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THE WRONG MAN

A NOVEL

BY

DOROTHEA GERARD

AUTHOR OF AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE, THE RICH MISS RIDDELL, ETELKA'S VOW, A QUEEN OF CURDS AND CREAM, ETC.

NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1896

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THE WRONG MAN.

CHAPTER I.

It was on a chilly evening of early spring that Lieutenant Milnovics sat down in his lodging to write a letter to his father. This had been a busy and somewhat exciting day, and most of his comrades were still talking over events in the dining-room of the Black Eagle, the one hotel of Lohatyn. But in spite of his twenty-six years, Stepan Milnovics was not sociable, neither had he any money to spend upon the bottles of more or less mediocre wine which formed the unavoidable adjunct to these convivial gatherings.

To-day he had come home even earlier than was his wont, because of the letter which pressed upon his mind. He knew that he would have no leisure for it to-morrow, and he knew that its arrival was already being anxiously looked for.

When he had hung up his wet cloak—for it was

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raining outside—he sat down at a small deal table and dipped his pen into a huge glass inkstand without a lid, of the sort that is in use in public schools.

"My beloved and reverend Father," he began to write upon half a sheet of foolscap paper,—"I know that you will be looking for this impatiently, although I am writing at the earliest moment that is possible. It is barely two hours since the cavalry inspector left us, after what, I am thankful to say, has been a successful day—for me, though not for all of us. There are two or three of my comrades who at this moment are, no doubt, in a much worse humour than I am; for the inspector speaks freely when he is roused, and he is easily roused, especially to displeasure. I am very sorry for them—but why do they not work? There are no presents to be had in this world, I have learnt that already; everything has to be bought, either with work or with money. You know that I have worked hard all winter; the inspector's words to me to-day were some reward for what has been at moments a very bitter slavery. My courage has never ebbed, but to-day it has risen another degree. Do not fear, my poor father,—I always told you that I had in me the makings of a soldier.

Lieutenant Milnovics raised his head for an instant, believing that he heard footsteps upon the

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wooden staircase,—he fancied even that he distinguished the subdued rattle of spurs. But as everything seemed quiet he went on writing.

"Wait until I get the next star on my collar. Fate has not been very kind to us, but we will conquer Fate yet; one only has to be strong and patient and not to forget that——"

"Come in," he said, impatiently, for there was a low knock at the door.

An officer in the same Lancer uniform which Milnovics wore entered the room, followed immediately by a second, who carefully closed the door.

"They have come to drag me back to their drinking-bout," was Milnovics's first thought, and an ungracious refusal had all but risen to his lips, when something in the faces of the two young lieutenants arrested his attention and caused the annoyance of the disturbance to sink suddenly out of sight. He laid down his pen and stood up from his chair, looking in silence from one of his comrades to the other.

"We are here as the representatives of Lieutenant Radford," began the elder of the two officers, a rosy-cheeked youth who was evidently a little nervous, and whose boyish treble shook just perceptibly. He paused, very red in the face, and looked at Milnovics, as though he were entreating him to

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answer. But Milnovics only stared back at him blankly, waiting for what might be coming.

"We are here," began the first speaker again, like a school-child repeating its lesson; but at this moment the younger and bolder of the two youths came to his leader's assistance.

"We are here in order to receive your instructions with regard to the affair between yourself and Lieutenant Radford," he said, jostling aside his comrade as he stepped forward, and speaking with a great deal more energy than the occasion required. This one had learnt his lesson much better than the other, but, like the other, he talked of a Lieutenant "Rahdfort."

"What affair?" Milnovics in his utter astonishment had almost replied, but he pulled himself together in time, struck by the absurdity of such a question at such a moment. He was now looking into the face of the second speaker, still without in the least comprehending the situation. He had stood thus for several seconds when it struck him that he must necessarily say something.

"I am entirely at Lieutenant Radford's disposal," he said, speaking quite in his usual tone and feeling anxious only not to betray his surprise.

"We presume that you have chosen your seconds," broke in the younger lieutenant, who by this time had taken the matter entirely into his hands.

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He had to repeat his question, for Milnovics did not seem to have heard him immediately.

"No, I have not yet chosen my seconds," he said, raising his head. "But I shall communicate with two of my comrades without delay."

Something had occurred to him which seemed to throw a certain amount of light on this matter,—a faint and unsatisfactory light, but nevertheless something a little better than utter darkness. He paused just perceptibly, and then added, "I presume that Lieutenant Radford has spoken to you of the remarks which passed between us last night at supper?"

The two lieutenants exchanged a rapid glance in which a shade of surprise was perceptible, but again it was the younger one who recovered himself first.

"Exactly. Those remarks are the reason of our being here. At what place and hour can we meet your representatives?" further inquired the well-instructed youth, as glibly as though this were not his *début* in the character of a second.

"In a private room of the hotel and in an hour's time," answered Milnovics, who had completely recovered his self-possession. "Does that arrangement suit you?"

"Perfectly," they both replied, in one breath.

"The two gentlemen whom you will find at the

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place indicated will by that time have received my instructions and be empowered to act in my name. I think this is all that you require to know. Good evening."

A sharp clanking of spurs, a mute salute on either side, and Stepan Milnovics was once more alone in his room, standing beside the table and looking at the door which had just closed.

For a brief space he remained thus, lending an ear to the sound of the descending footsteps. Then his eyes left the door and stared fixedly at the fresh, muddy prints marking the spot where Lieutenant Radford's seconds had been standing within the minute. He felt at this moment what the French describe as "*tombé des nues*." If Radford himself had burst into the room with a bare sword in his grasp, it would scarcely have surprised him more than did this challenge. Radford, of all men in the world, the lieutenant with the golden hair and the English name, who looked so far from savage, and for whose blood he certainly was not conscious of thirsting!

The remarks which had passed between them last night had been on the subject of church ceremonies. He tried now to recall what exactly had been said.

Somebody at the supper-table had asked Radford why he had missed appearing at dinner.

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"Because I was kicking my heels in church," Radford had replied, "and in a Ruthenian church, too. It was my turn to chaperon the men, and, as ill-luck would have it, I hit upon their Palm Sunday. No end of prostrations. I actually thought they would lick the floor clean by dint of smacking it,—no easy job, I can tell you, for scrubbing is evidently considered a luxury here."

"The floors in our churches are washed before every feast-day," Milnovics had remarked, with a somewhat darkening face.

"Oh, you're one of them, Milnovics—I forgot," said Radford, lightly. "By the way, perhaps you can tell us what's the object of blessing all that bread and butter, or whatever the stuff is which they say prayers over? Do the priests dine upon it afterwards?"

"It is not bread and butter," Milnovics replied, in a somewhat sharper tone, "and the priests do not dine upon it. It is bread and salt, and the blessing is symbolical. Surely it would be better not to talk of things which you do not understand, and which your remarks only help to make ridiculous."

Radford made some indifferent reply, and the conversation drifted to other subjects.

This was absolutely all that had passed. Who but a veritable fire-eater could discover here the ground for a challenge? Rather had it not the

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appearance of being one of those grounds which are sometimes snatched at as a pretext—used, in fact, as a mark to cover the real cause of a quarrel? Milnovics knew well enough that such cases were not infrequent, and that whenever, for any reason, it appeared undesirable to make public the real ground of the difference—as especially when the name of a woman was involved—it was quite a common practice to select whatever trifle lay nearest at hand, and which by tacit understanding lent its countenance to the *rencontre*. But here the theory would not hold. There could be no question of any woman between himself and Lieutenant Radford, just as little as there existed, to his knowledge, a question of any serious difference between them. It was nearly incredible, for verily Radford did not look like this sort of man; but here Milnovics reminded himself that he had known this new comrade for barely a month, since it was in February only that Radford had entered the regiment. For anything he knew Radford might be any sort of man.

Finding himself beside the table, Milnovics dipped his pen in the ink, as though he were about to finish his uncompleted letter. Twice he read through what he had written, without being able to get at the sense of it. He had lost the thread of what he had meant to say. Besides, what was the use of saying it now? By to-morrow morning there

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might be something quite different to say. The meeting would be very early, of course. And then only it flashed upon him that, instead of sitting here, he ought to be looking about him for a pair of seconds, since this duel apparently was a solid fact, and not a mere practical joke.

He took his damp cloak from the wall and put it on. Below it on the boards a pool of rain-water had already collected. His sword, too, was hanging on the wall; he unsheathed it and tried the edge with the palm of his hand, half inclined to laugh as he did it. To-morrow morning, was it to be? Even now he still had some difficulty in taking the matter quite seriously.

In the passage outside there was no light, only the reflection of a lamp burning in the window of a house across the street. Milnovics saw that some one was seated at the head of the stairs, and as he approached, a small dusky figure rose, as though to bar his passage.

"Herr Lieutenant," said a woman's voice, in unmistakably Jewish accents and in an insinuating undertone, "I have something I could tell the Herr Lieutenant."

"Let me pass," replied Milnovics, shortly.

He had recognised Nessi Meerkatz, the daughter of the old Jew in whose house he lodged, a young woman of an extremely loose reputation, whose face,

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if thoroughly scrubbed, might possibly have been pretty, and whose black hair was for ever in sore need of a comb.

"The Herr Lieutenant is always unkind to poor Nessi," said the little Jewess, pretending to whimper; "none of the other gentlemen are so unkind as he. But I have a good heart; I will tell him what I know,—only he must ask me. Will not Herr Lieutenant ask me?"

"No. Let me pass, I say." This was not the first time that, while hurrying either in or out of his lodging, he had found the tousled, black-eyed little Jewess in his way, and always with something to say, which he had neither time nor inclination to listen to. If he had noticed her as anything but a nuisance, it had only been to wonder whether she knew the use of soap. Her insinuating glances and coaxing nasal tone had always been vaguely repulsive to him.

"Let me pass, I say," and he brushed past her without ceremony.

"But, Herr Lieutenant," she called after him, in a sharper tone, "wait only one little minute,—there is something which I should talk to the Herr Lieutenant about. He will be angry with me, maybe, but then perhaps he will forgive poor Nessi,—for it is his own fault, indeed——"

Nessi broke off and peered sulkily down the dark

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staircase. The closing of the house-door had told her that she was wasting her words.

"Let him go to perdition!" she muttered, shrugging her plump shoulders and tossing back the untidy locks that were for ever tumbling into her eyes.

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CHAPTER II.

At this season of melting snow, when every half-mile on a country road meant so many more ounces of mud to be carried home on boots or hoofs, the riding-school was the only spot where a duel could comfortably take place.

Seven o'clock was still striking upon the church-tower of Lohatyn, and not more than a few passes had been made, when quite suddenly Lieutenant Milnovics's sword fell out of his hand.

"Hold!" cried the seconds.

"The matter is concluded," added one of them.

And so indeed it was, since "until the first blood drawn" had been the condition settled, and now the blood was dropping fast from Milnovics's arm on to the thick layer of sawdust that covered the riding-school floor.

One of Lieutenant Radford's juvenile seconds heaved a secret sigh of relief. The sight of blood had made him feel almost certain that he was going to faint, and he stood by now, looking much whiter than did the wounded man.

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Lieutenant Radford lowered his sword, and, coming a few steps forward, stood still again, looking towards the spot where the regimental doctor was already busy with his adversary. He was a tall, powerfully-built young man, with the true Anglo-Saxon breadth of shoulders, with wonderfully blue eyes and close-cropped curls of almost too crude a gold. The strain of excitement had scarcely yet relaxed upon his handsome features, but the angry fire which but a minute ago still burned in the blue eyes was already dying out.

It was under one of the tall windows that the doctor had placed himself with his patient, for the huge riding-school was as yet but dimly lighted by the early morning light. Having slit open the sleeve of Lieutenant Milnovics's blouse, he glanced towards Radford.

"What are you waitng for, Lieutenant Radford? There is going to be no more fighting to-day. You've heard, haven't you, that the matter is concluded?"

"I am not waiting because I want to fight," replied Radford, putting away his sword; "I am waiting to shake hands with Lieutenant Milnovics whenever you have done with him. There is no more grudge betwen us now, I hope."

"You will have to do it somewhat less vigorously than is your habit," drily replied the doctor, who did

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not approve of duels; "unless you handle him like broken glass the hæmorrhage will be considerably increased."

"I will be very careful," replied Radford in an unexpectedly submissive tone. A few minutes ago he had felt quite capable of killing his adversary, but he was not capable of harbouring a grudge. The moment that he considered his honour to be satisfied, his anger also was spent.

"I feel certain that this first difference between us will also be the last," he said, looking earnestly at his comrade. "I wish, with all my heart, that it had never occurred. Hang it, Milnovics!" he burst out upon some new impulse, "what made you choose just this thing of all others to hit out at? If you had pounced upon anything else I think I could have been quite patient," and he tried to smile, evidently feeling that the situation required to be relaxed. "You would have been welcome to abuse either my horses or my dogs, or even the cut of my moustache, but my troop is the one thing that I really am touchy about."

Milnovics had not spoken yet. He now glanced up from the bandage which the doctor was adjusting upon his right elbow. His eyes were full of an undisguised astonishment.

"I have abused neither your horses nor your troop. Why are you bringing in these things now?"

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"Well, perhaps 'abused' is rather too strong a word for the occasion; let us say that you have made uncomplimentary remarks."

"About your troop?"

"Of course. Why, Milnovics, what makes you so slow to-day?"

The other looked across at him for a moment in silence.

"Perhaps I am slow; at any rate I do not understand yet. I am not aware of having ever made any remark about your troop, either uncomplimentary or otherwise."

The words were so distinctly and deliberately spoken that they were perfectly audible to every one in the riding-school. The seconds on both sides exchanged questioning glances. Evidently there was something here that required clearing up.

Radford himself began to look bewildered.

"But, Milnovics, recollect yourself; did you not yesterday, after the close of the inspection, make the remark that my troop had disgraced the squadron in the eyes of the inspector, and that my men looked like nothing so much as potato sacks tied on to the backs of *Koniki?*" *

"Yesterday?"

"Yes, of course, yesterday."

"And to whom?"

* Small peasant horses.

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"Why, to—to Nessi Meerkatz. I had not meant to mention her name, but there,—the thing is said now."

"And it was on the strength of her report that you challenged me?"

Milnovics again looked at his comrade with something unspeakable in his piercing black eyes, while his somewhat thin lips were drawn a little inwards.

Radford reddened with vexation. He understood already that he had been rash, though he had not fairly acknowledged it even to himself.

"What reason had I to doubt her report?" he said, speaking faster, for his excitement was beginning to rise. "No, she cannot have invented it,—those words certainly were said."

"Then somebody else said them. The only time I spoke to Nessi Meerkatz yesterday was to tell her to get out of my way."

"You mean that you are the wrong man?" cried Radford, in a voice which rang with consternation. "For Heaven's sake, say No! Please tell me that you really did make that joke about the potato-sacks!" and he moved a step nearer, looking almost imploringly towards his comrade.

"I am sorry I cannot oblige you. You have heard my assertion."

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"Then you really are the wrong man?"

"I certainly am not the right one; not the man who made the remark you have just quoted."

"Good God! then why did you accept my challenge?"

"Because I was given to understand that we were fighting out the question of the church ceremonies."

"The church ceremonies,—to be sure. I could think of no better pretext on the spur of the moment, and I wasn't particularly inclined either to have my name coupled with that of that little slut of a Meerkatz, and if I had brought up that remark I'd have had to name my authority, don't you see? So I just laid hold of our talk at supper, and it was only my seconds who knew what we were really fighting about. Of course, I thought you would understand. Gracious heavens, what a tangle! What is it I have done?"

"What you *should* have done would have been to sift the matter a little more carefully before sending me your seconds."

"Yes, yes,—it is all true, but I scarcely knew what I was doing. You know how hard the inspector was upon me,—I suppose it was my own fault, but it put me off my balance. I was feeling excited and sore. I see it all now. But what reason had she to tell lies? I will shake that girl half out of her

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skin. Milnovics, can you forgive me? I don't think I shall be able to forgive myself."

He stepped close up to Milnovics and impulsively held out his hand.

"You see that I cannot shake hands at this moment," said Milnovics, in a tone which, beside that of the other speaker, sounded a little chilly.

"But you can say that you forgive me?"

A sharp contraction passed over Milnovics's face; possibly it was caused by the pain of the wound with which the doctor was still busy. He did not answer immediately.

"Do not ask me yet," he said, after a moment, hurriedly and low. "It would be easy to say 'Yes,' but I cannot make pretences. It is too soon. You have done a very foolish thing, and I am suffering for it. I will forgive you if I can, but not now."

"Yes, I have done a very foolish thing. The heavens be thanked that no worse harm has come of it! His arm will be all right again in a few days, will it not, doctor?"

"That depends on what you call a few," grumbled the regimental doctor into his grizzled moustache. "I can't say anything until I have properly examined the wound, and there's no light for doing that here. This is only a provisional bandage."

"But in a few weeks at least——"

"I tell you that I know absolutely nothing until

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after the examination. Leave him alone now, he has lost a good deal of blood and he must get home immediately."

Radford stood for some moments more, still lost in amazement, then, appearing to recollect something, he turned sharply and left the riding-school in a sudden access of hurry.

A few minutes later the doctor followed with his patient. The seconds still lingered, looking into each other's perplexed faces and exchanging hurried remarks.

"I cannot recollect an exactly parallel case," remarked one of Milnovics's seconds. "It was indeed not hard to guess that something was being kept in the background, for the ostensible cause of the quarrel seemed to me from the first to be inadequate, but who could suppose that he had not made sure of what he was about?" And he looked reproachfully at the two youths who had acted for Radford, and who now stood by somewhat dejectedly, well aware that a good share of the guilt in this imprudently conducted matter might rightly be imputed to themselves.

On leaving the riding-school Lieutenant Radford had gone straight to the house of Abraham Meerkatz. A frail, little, old Jew, who appeared for ever to be staggering under the weight of his white beard, was engaged in getting his crockery-

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shop into order for the day. His face was the colour of a tallow candle, and his long, limp fingers shook continually. The sight of an officer in the doorway at this unexpected hour, and more still, something in the expression of the officer's face, gave him such a "turn" that the earthenware dish he was holding dropped on to the floor with a dull, unmusical crash.

"Where is your daughter?" demanded Lieutenant Radford, peremptorily, and still breathing hard, for he had walked fast. "I must speak to her instantly."

"My daughter? Gracious Herr Lieutenant, it is you? I scarcely knew your face,—what a fright you gave me,—see that dish there,—sixteen kreutzers at the lowest valuation,—it is done for,—and all because of that fright."

"Where is your daughter, I say?" repeated Radford, with an unpleasant look in his eyes.

"My daughter? Holy Moses! in her bed, I suppose,—she's never any good to me in the mornings. As if it wasn't bad enough for me to have to take the things off the shelves with this pain in my old back. What a fright, to be sure; but the gracious Herr Lieutenant is always generous —he will make good to me the sixteen kreutzers, will he not?"

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But Radford was already in the passage, having traversed the shop in two strides.

"Fourteen kreutzers let it be then, Herr Lieutenant," whimpered Abraham Meerkatz after him, and receiving no answer, turned back sadly to the contemplation of the green glazed fragments on the floor.

Nessi Meerkatz, her toilet but barely completed, was sitting on the edge of her unmade bed, lazily twisting her tangled black hair into a rough knot. She was not nearly so startled by the sight of a visitor as her father had been, although so stormy entrance evidently astonished her.

"You unhappy creature, have I caught you?" broke out Radford, still breathless with excitement and haste. "You shall not escape me until you have given an account of your cursed lies. Speak, girl,—what do you mean by your falsehood?"

"Wherefore should I give an account?" answered Nessi, in a slow, sulky drawl. By the look of his face she knew why he had come, and she was frightened now, though she was trying not to show it.

"What do you mean by your lie about the potato-sacks and the *Koniki?*"

"That isn't a lie. It was said so, and very funny it sounded, too," and she laughed uneasily.

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"But you told me that it was Lieutenant Milnovics who said it?"

Nessi shrugged her shoulders. "Perhaps I told you so."

"But he did not say it!"

"Then some one else did."

"You confess you lie?"

She shrugged her shoulders again. "How do I know whether it's a lie? Lieutenant Milnovics may have said the same thing."

"Who was it?" said Radford, peremptorily.

Nessi played with a loose button on her bodice, and made no answer.

"Who was it?" and stepping close up to her, his face white with anger, he took her by the arm, not over-gently.

"*Wai!*" howled Nessi, collapsing on the instant. "The Herr Lieutenant wants to kill me,—oh *wai!*"

"Who was it?"

"It was the Herr Lieutenant Brelitz."

"Brelitz, was it? Then why in the name of all the devils did you say it was Milnovics?"

"Because I hate him," snapped out Nessi, through the midst of her tears. "Never has he looked at me yet. Even yesterday at night when I meant to tell him and he might have put things right, he only pushed me aside."

"He was right to push you aside, for you are

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a venomous little toad. It would have been better for me if I too had gone out of your way. See what you have done, you vile girl,—a great misfortune might easily have happened,—do you know that I have wounded Lieutenant Milnovics in the arm?"

"You might have cut off his arm for anything I care," she snarled; "I am glad that he is wounded." And her black eyes lit up with a spiteful joy.

Radford withdrew his hand, and looked at the small untidy figure with a sense of overpowering disgust; and yet it was only a few days ago that Nessi Meerkatz had seemed to him quite tolerably attractive.

"And if Lieutenant Milnovics had lost his arm through your fault, do you think that would have been the end of this business? How do you know that there would not have been an inquiry? Would not the police have had a word to say in the matter, eh, Nessi? Even as it is he is wounded, you know."

All the ugly delight in Nessi's face turned into unmixed alarm,—for of all words in the dictionary that of "police" is the one most full of terror to Hebrew ears.

"The police?" she stammered; "does the Herr Lieutenant really mean that the police could be

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after me for this? Will there really be an inquiry? Oh *wai*, oh *wai!* Why did I do this thing?"

"Because you are a creature without conscience and without heart. If you must be howling, why do you not howl over that man who has gone upstairs now with the bandaged arm?"

"But it is not really true, is it? The police cannot take me? Beautiful Herr Lieutenant, please say that it is not true."

"No, it is not true; stop that noise, for Heaven's sake! Nobody is going to take you, nobody wants you, such vermin as you is generally free to run where it likes."

And turning quickly he went from the room, leaving Nessi still rocking her body on the edge of the bed in a paroxysm of mingled terror and self-pity.

In the shop Abraham Meerkatz was dejectedly collecting the fragments of the broken dish and groaning audibly every time he had to stoop afresh.

"Fourteen kreutzers, Herr Lieutenant," he whined, as Radford was passing out — "only fourteen kreutzers!"

Radford pulled out a paper florin and threw it on to the counter in passing.

"It's been a good *Geschäft** after all," reflected

* Bargain.

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Abraham Meerkatz, and as he stooped to pick up the last piece of green earthenware he quite forgot to groan over the pain in his back.

Once out in the street Lieutenant Radford attempted to collect his thoughts. Going over in memory that which had happened yesterday, it was not difficult to see how it had all come about. When, after the departure of the cavalry inspector, Nessi had received him laughingly, telling him to his face that she had already heard all about his failure, and asking him with coquettish impertinence whether he was coming to her to be consoled, he had replied by losing his temper forthwith. Who was it who had made these remarks about him? he had fiercely demanded, and Nessi, taking fright at his tone, had stammered out that it was the Lieutenant Milnovics,—choosing him partly because she was afraid of naming Brelitz, who, as she knew, would never forgive her, but doing so principally in a flash of resentment against the one officer in this division of the regiment who had shown himself perfectly unassailable by her bold black eyes, and whom, as she vaguely foresaw, she was by this means probably entangling in some sort of unpleasantness.

It was easy enough to see how it had come about, now that the thing could not be undone.

Half-way up the street Radford met Lieuten-

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ant Brelitz, and instinctively quickened his pace so as not to have to speak to him. Brelitz, in ignorance of what had happened, returned his comrade's hasty salute and dark look in genuine astonishment. But Radford hurried on. The sight of Brelitz was too disturbing at this moment,—for if Milnovics was the wrong man, this was the right one, the one whom he ought to have challenged and fought. He might challenge him yet, but he had no more wish to do so. If he was angry with him any longer, it was only for not being in Milnovics's place; for the potato-sacks and the *Koniki* had quite lost their sting under the pressure of weightier events. And besides, he had had enough of duelling for just one day.

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CHAPTER III.

It was late in the afternoon before Lieutenant Radford, finding himself at length at leisure, started in some slight trepidation for Dr. Bruck's house. Until he had heard the final verdict he knew that his mind could not be entirely at rest. Not that he had any serious misgivings, for his nature was one of those which always instinctively hope for the best. As he hurried through the unpaved, wretched-looking streets, he kept at bay whatever doubts were ready to assail him by recalling to his memory all the cases he had ever heard of in which a cut upon the arm had proved to be no worse than an inconvenience of a few weeks. There had been Captain Binden, for instance, whose arm had been slashed almost to the bone in that affair with Kestler, and who yet had been back with his regiment before the month was out. It is true that Milnovics's arm had bled very freely, but that need not mean more than a mere flesh-wound,—yes, probably it would be no more than that; and just then Lieutenant Radford turned into the cov-

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ered entrance of the house where lived Dr. Bruck, and at the same moment met the doctor himself coming out with a small bag in his hand.

"Dr. Bruck, wait one moment, I beg of you—I had hoped to find you at home. I have come to ask you what is the result of the examination. Please be so good as to tell me how many days it will be before Milnovics can use his arm again?"

The doctor looked at Radford doubtfully, then, taking a fresh grasp of his bag, he tried to pass him.

"I cannot speak to you now; I cannot stop. There is a diphtheria case waiting for me at the other end of the town."

"But you *must* speak to me," said Radford, who felt suddenly disturbed by something in the doctor's face. "I want you to tell me immediately, in two words, if you like, exactly how matters stand with Milnovics," and he took hold of the doctor's sleeve with the air of a man who means to have his way.

"You want to know exactly how they stand?"

"Yes."

"Well then, you can have your two words, if you like. The *musculus biceps* and the *musculus brachialis* are both cut clean through, that is how the matter stands."

"The *musculus biceps?* Let me see—I have

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forgotten all my Latin. Please talk German, doctor. What is it that is cut clean through?"

"The chief muscle of the elbow."

"A muscle can't be healed, can it?"

"I've never heard so, anyway."

"Then that would mean—good gracious, doctor, do you mean to say that he will not be able to use his arm again? I suppose it can't be any good to him without the muscles."

"I suppose exactly the same thing."

"Then what you want to tell me is that Milnovics has lost the use of his arm—of his right arm?"

"No, that's not what I *wanted* to tell you," snapped the doctor; "it's what you insisted on hearing. Let me go, I say; they're waiting for me over there."

"But in time, surely in time," persisted Radford, taking a firmer hold of the doctor's sleeve. "Everybody knows that time works wonders. How can you say anything until the healing process has begun? Cut clean through, you say? Are you quite sure that nothing can be done? Supposing that I were to telegraph to Vienna for Billroth?"

The doctor broke into a sharp short laugh.

"Telegraph for a dozen Billroths if it helps to put your mind at ease, but Billroth can't put a new muscle into his elbow any more than I can. There

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are no 'perhapses' and no 'ifs' in the case, my young friend; it's as simple as a sum in arithmetic; I'd certainly pluck every student who couldn't tell me that in his very first year."

"But without the use of his right arm surely he cannot go on serving?"

"I never said he could," growled the doctor. "But I wouldn't take it so to heart if I were you. What does anything matter since your honour is 'satisfied?' Duelling is a fine practice, isn't it? So chivalrous, so picturesque, and—above all—so just! There,—I have no time to answer any more questions now," and wrenching himself free of the other's hold, he slipped out of the doorway and up the street.

Lieutenant Radford made no attempt to follow him. A momentary sense of physical weakness had come over him quite suddenly, forcing him to put out his hand to steady himself against the wall. The only time that he had ever before felt any sensation approaching to this had been when, as a boy of twelve, a falling tile had struck and partially stunned him. At this moment, too, it seemed to him that he had recently received a severe blow on the head, and was still reeling under its effects. Within a minute he had recovered himself sufficiently to set off walking down the street, very slowly at first, and with something of a dazed look in his

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eyes, but presently so fast that when for the second time to-day he reached the house of Abraham Meerkatz, his face was deeply flushed and his uniform bespattered up to the collar with the liquid yellow mud under which at this season Lohatyn annually threatened to disappear.

Up-stairs in one of the two rooms of which his lodging was composed, Milnovics, his shabby blouse unbuttoned over his shirt, was sitting before the table. His dark face was much paler than usual, and his right arm thickly bandaged. On the table beside him there lay an open book, which in a calmer moment Radford would probably have recognised as the *Dienstreglement*,—a ponderous volume which every wearer of the Austrian uniform is supposed to know at least as well as his Paternoster, but whose outside was generally enough to make Lieutenant Radford instinctively yawn.

At this moment he did not even see that there was a book upon the table—he saw nothing except that bandage on Milnovics's right arm. The first sight of it struck upon him with so painful an emotion that he was not immediately able to speak. Almost a minute passed before he sat down, still struggling with himself, and still not able to take his eyes off the bandage, but still without speaking.

Milnovics had been watching him in evident surprise.

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"You have something to say to me?" he asked at last, and in his voice too the surprise betrayed itself.

"I have so many things to say to you," broke out Radford, suddenly finding it possible to speak, "that I don't know where to begin. I have just come from Dr. Bruck."

"Ah!" There was a distinct shade of interest in Milnovics's tone, and his straight black eyebrows contracted quickly. Evidently he was already suspicious.

"You have come from Dr. Bruck? And it is that which has excited you? Yes, I see."

"It has confounded me, Milnovics."

"I understand; he has probably said more to you than to me,—yes, I think I quite understand."

Radford took sudden fright. He saw, too late, that he had made another blunder, and grasped blindly at the nearest means of repairing it.

"It is not what he *said* that excited me," he stammered, colouring like a schoolboy under the keen scrutiny of Milnovics's black eyes, "but only —but only that I am not able to forgive myself for my own imprudence,—I have been thinking of it all day, and——"

He broke off and turned away, unable any longer to support the gaze of Milnovics's eyes.

"It is not something you have been thinking

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of all day which has put you into the state you are in now," said Milnovics, after a moment; "it is something which you have heard quite lately,—from Dr. Bruck, of course. This morning you already knew that you had been imprudent, and yet you did not look like this. What did Dr. Bruck say to you, Radford? I want to know it exactly."

"Nothing in particular," said Radford uncertainly, and still with averted face. "I mean, he said that the arm would take longer to heal than he had at first supposed."

"That also is not true," interrupted Milnovics, a little impatiently. "Tell me what he really did say."

He paused and looked at Radford, but there was no reply.

"Radford"—and this time, despite the efforts he was making, his tone betrayed something of that anguish of suspense which is so much worse than any sort of certainty—"we are no children, surely. Do you not see that, having said as much as you have said, it would be unmerciful not to say more? Tell me, I entreat of you, upon your honour—tell me every word of what has just passed between Dr. Bruck and yourself."

"Do not make me tell you, Milnovics,—Dr. Bruck will tell you; perhaps there is some mistake."

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"About what? No, I will hear it from you now —this very minute. Listen, Radford. This morning you wanted to have my forgiveness, did you not? Well, listen, then; you shall have my forgiveness, but only if you tell me the whole truth now. Do you understand me? This is the price of my forgiveness. Speak quickly—you do not know how you are torturing me; you cannot know what this means for me."

Milnovics had risen as he spoke, and stood now close in front of the chair on which Radford sat. Radford slowly turned his head and looked up into the other's face, as though he were asking for mercy. But there was no mercy written there, only a fierce impatience and an almost savage determination. He lowered his eyes and began to speak, feeling that he had no more will of his own. In hurried sentences he repeated all that he had heard from the doctor, not omitting even the smallest detail; the look upon Milnovics's face had convinced him that to keep anything back would be unfair.

Milnovics stood so immovable as he listened that he scarcely seemed to be breathing.

"And he said positively that I could never use my arm again?" he asked, in a much quieter tone, when Radford had done speaking.

Radford only nodded in reply; he knew well enough that at that moment he had no voice.

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"But that would mean the end of my career," said Milnovics, still aloud, but speaking to himself. "Yes, I understand. I had guessed half of this for myself, but he would not speak out. It is always better to know the whole than the half."

Radford had put his hand over his eyes in order not to see his comrade's face. Not that he had the means of realising entirely what was passing in the mind of the other, but, despite the absence of excitement in Milnovics's last words, something told him that it would be an indiscretion, almost an indecency, to look at him at this moment. He heard how Milnovics returned to his chair and again sat down, and he began to wish that he would speak. He could not look at him, so he told himself, until he had again heard his voice. When the silence had lasted several minutes more he took his hand from his eyes, feeling that he could not wait any longer.

There was nothing remarkable to be seen about Milnovics. His face was only a little paler than it had been before, but the emotion had apparently died out of it. He was sitting at the table, exactly as he had been sitting at Radford's entrance, with his left hand upon the open book, but he was not reading, he was looking straight out of the window in front of him, lost in deep thought, and evidently having forgotten Radford's presence. Looking at him, Radford was afraid of speaking, and yet this

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silence was more unbearable than any words that could be said; he felt that he must break it at any price.

"If it really should be so," he began, tentatively, "I mean if you really are forced to leave the army —though Dr. Bruck did not exactly say so in so many words—have you any plan as to what you will do?"

Milnovics started as though out of a trance, and turned round quickly in his chair.

"What is that to you?" he said, roughly.

"It is everything to me, since everything that follows has its origin in my own act."

For a short space Milnovics still gazed upon him with angry eyes and with every nerve and muscle strained, as though he were about to spring from his chair, then his attitude relaxed. He appeared to remember what he was doing. Several seconds passed before he had controlled himself sufficiently to speak.

"There has been no time to make a plan yet," he said, in a curiously measured tone. "If it should be as I suppose, I shall have to think of a plan. I am young still, and the military career is not the only one in the world."

"Good gracious, no!" said Radford, with a movement of relief. "There are dozens of other ways of getting on. One can work with one's head

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as well as with one's hands, can one not? And I am certain that your head is worth at least a dozen of mine." He tried to laugh, but not successfully.

"Yes, one can work with one's head," remarked Milnovics in the same flat tone. "There are many people who do so."

"Of course there are; but look here, Milnovics, surely we are going too fast. Dr. Bruck has not yet spoken the final word. It is not impossible that you may be able to go on serving."

"No, it is not impossible. We are certainly going too fast. At any rate, there can be no use in discussing the subject now." And again he turned towards the table and looked straight in front of him.

Radford watched him, understanding quite well that the other wanted to be rid of him, and yet not able immediately to make up his mind to go. There were a hundred questions burning on his lips, not one of which he dared to ask. It occurred to him now that he knew next to nothing about this comrade of his. They were not in the same squadron, and Radford himself had not been two months in the regiment. In this short time he had indeed made several friends, but the taciturn and somewhat unamiable Milnovics had not been among these. Who was he, and what was he, except just being Lieutenant Milnovics and having thirty-six

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men and as many horses to drill? What would remain of him when once he was out of his lieutenant's uniform,—supposing that he had to take it off? What other chances in life stood open for him? Who belonged to him, and did he belong to any one except just to his Majesty Francis Joseph? All this and much more Radford longed to ask and yet sat silent, feeling that in face of the other's reserve it was impossible to press further upon him.

Milnovics had again fallen back into his reflections and sat with his eyes upon the darkening window, thinking of things to which his comrade could have no clue.

Having waited for a little while, Radford got up and left the room as quietly as though some one were lying asleep. He had already resolved that he would go back to Dr. Bruck, for Dr. Bruck was the only man whom he could speak to about this, and besides the doctor was one of the veterans of the regiment, and would doubtless be able to answer at least some of the questions that were pursuing him.

At the sound of the closing door Milnovics raised his head. His eyes returned to the *Dienstreglement*, which still lay open before him. For a short space he gazed at it as though it were something strange to him, then closing the thick vol-

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ume with a bang which had something final in its sound, he pushed it to one side. Having looked round to convince himself that he was alone, he now opened the drawer of his table, took out the letter with which he had been busy not twenty-four hours ago, and which still lay there half-finished, read it carefully through, and then with a sudden savage gesture crumpled it into a ball with his left hand and hurled it into a corner of the room.

"It is a lie," he muttered with white lips. "To be strong and patient is not enough. Everything is a cruel, miserable lie!"

Lieutenant Radford found Dr. Bruck barely returned from his last sick-call and in an even worse humour than usual.

"That's what comes from treating those brats like toys, instead of like reasonable creatures," were the snarled-out words with which he greeted Radford at his entrance. "Do you suppose that a mountain of gold would have induced that small monkey to unlock his jaws to-day? I can't look into his throat from the outside, can I? And diphtheria, mind you, the worst form of diphtheria. Parents are deplorable things, I tell you."

"Dr. Bruck, I have come back to ask you about Milnovics."

"Milnovics? Milnovics? What do you want

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now? Surely I've had enough of Molnovics for one day?"

"Only one question: has he any relations, any brothers? What sort of a fortune has he got? What is his position,—I mean what would his position be if he really should be forced to leave the army?"

"You call that one question do you? I call it half a dozen. His position? Why, his position would be just the position of any other son of a Ruthenian *Popa* who has trouble enough to feed himself without counting his children."

"His father is a priest?"

"Didn't you know that? Yes, of course his father is a priest, an old priest, and pretty shaky by this time, I fancy."

"And are the priests in this country so badly paid?"

"Bless me, what a question! To be sure, you've only been two months in Galicia. Who's to pay them, do you suppose? Do the peasants look much like large tithes, eh?—Has any one ever heard of such an obstinate monkey! But I'll whip him with my own hands if he has the good luck to recover."

"And he has no private fortune?"

"No, he has none."

"And will they give him no pension?"

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"You know as well as I that they don't give pensions to people who have served under ten years."

"Are there any other relations?"

"Oh, yes, aunts and sisters in plenty; I've heard that they all starved themselves to a set of skeletons in order to scrape together the money for his studies. He's what a poet would call 'the pride of the family,' so I've heard say. It seems that he had taken it into his head to become a soldier,—and a rattling good soldier he would have made, too, if it had not been for accidents," and the doctor darted a spiteful side-glance at his interlocutor. "Yes, duels are a fine institution no doubt, but I suppose I'm too dull-witted to see the beauty of them."

"An old father, and sisters, and no money," repeated Radford to himself. "And are you quite certain, doctor, that he cannot go on being a soldier?"

"Yes, I'm pretty certain of that too. What's a lieutenant without a right arm?"

"Must he lose his arm? Is there no alternative?"

"Oh yes, there is an alternative. There are two possibilities: either mortification sets in or it doesn't set in; if it sets in I'll have to cut off his arm for him, if it doesn't set in he's welcome to keep it, but it

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will be about as much good to him as a piece of wood."

Radford stood for a few moments longer, looking only at the floor. He had not yet sat down. Presently he turned and went out of the room, forgetting even to say good evening to the doctor. He felt afraid of making some ridiculous exhibition of himself if he stayed one minute longer.

It was almost dark by this time. "An old father—no fortune—sisters—the pride of the family," such broken thoughts as these shot backwards and forwards through his mind as he walked in a great hurry towards his lodging, without having any distinct idea as to what he would do when he got there. In his hitherto smooth and easy life no emotion approaching to what he now felt had ever come near him. The burden of self-reproach seemed about to break his heart. Had he indeed any right to the rest of his life? In the agitation that was sweeping through his mind the answer almost sounded like "No." For twenty-four hours past he had been living in an abnormal state of mind, and, now that the climax was reached, common-sense seemed likely to be submerged by pure nervous excitement. He began to think of the room in his lodging, of the drawer in his writing-table, and he kept walking faster and faster. He could see that drawer with extraordinary vividness, he

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could see himself turning the key in the lock, and then——

A hand was laid on his shoulder, and turning round with a start he found Dr. Bruck, breathless, beside him.

"A nice pace to lead a man of my age out walking," panted the doctor—"truly a nice pace."

"I didn't ask for your company," said Radford, angrily.

"I know you didn't, but I've taken a sudden fancy to yours. You think you're going to your lodging, do you? Well, I think quite differently; I think you're coming along with me to the Black Eagle. You've got a revolver at home, haven't you, my young friend? Well, I may be an old fool, but I've taken it into my head not to leave you and your revolver *tête-à-tête* until your nerves have got a little nearer to a normal condition. I know you young scatter-brains pretty well all round, and maybe, too, I should not have given it you quite so sharply just now, if that little devil of a boy hadn't put me off my balance. But you've had about enough for to-day. Come along to the Black Eagle."

Long, long after this evening, which was the beginning of the history of his life, Radford used to try and imagine what would have happened if Dr. Bruck had not stopped him on his way to his lodging. Not that he was conscious of having

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come to any concrete resolve, but nevertheless there really was a revolver in that locked drawer in his lodging, and he really had been thinking of it at the moment when the doctor's hand was laid upon his shoulder.

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CHAPTER IV.

The world has often been roughly divided into a lucky and an unlucky half, and although a doubt may occasionally arise as to the rightful frontier-line, the point in Alfred Radford's case was at any rate perfectly clear. If he had not literally lain in the proverbial golden cradle in which fairy princes lie, it had at least been in one of unimpeachable material and faultless appointments, and if he had not hitherto moved exclusively in Court circles, he had undoubtedly had a very pleasant part to play in those in which his lot was cast.

By a series of circumstances his father had become one of those Anglo-Austrians of whom a certain percentage is to be met with in every province of the dual empire, and who, while never ceasing to call themselves Englishmen, have yet found it quite possible to strike root in a foreign soil. As the second son of a Suffolk country lawyer, George Radford had at the age of twenty been despatched to the colonies, and there in twenty further years had managed, more by good luck than by good man-

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agement, to make a considerable fortune. Returning to Europe in his fortieth year, fate gave him the lovely Hilda von Feuchtenstein as fellow-passenger, and this proved to be the chief circumstance which eventually made of him an Anglo-Austrian. By the time Trieste was reached George Radford's fate was sealed. Hilda could not, or thought she could not, support the British climate, and as in default of ready money she possessed a tumble-down castle standing in an untrimmed park, George decided, without any great pang, for his father was dead and his brother was a stranger to him, to settle upon his wife's property. Soon the castle was rebuilt and the park put in order, and in a few years more George Radford had subsided into one of those peaceful country bumpkins who are perfectly content to watch their crops and their sons grow up at a safe distance from the disturbances of the capital. What there was of energy in his nature had been expended in the colonies, and whatever there was of ambition was completely satisfied by Alfred's success. For Alfred had so far been an undeniable success,—physically in the first place, to all appearances morally also, and quite enough so intellectually not to mar the general effect. So great a favourite was he in the country society in which he had hitherto spent most of his time, and in which the only son and heir of the wealthy Mr. Radford

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and of the former Hilda von Feuchtenstein was necessarily a person of some importance, that but for something intrinsically sound in his nature the young man could scarcely have escaped becoming either a ridiculous sop or a worthless worldling. Neither his father's guineas nor his mother's quarterings, taken separately, would have made his position what it was, but the combination was generally found to be irresistible.

In this way, therefore, Alfred had grown up, being acquainted with such things as anxiety or sorrow only by hearsay, never having missed anything that he required, never having wept over any grave,—without any of those contrarieties which imbitter the mind but also steel the character, and surrounded with nothing but those joys which indeed expand the heart, but are also so fatally apt to clog even the noblest will. Personally he was neither quite an Englishman nor quite an Austrian,, and yet he was a little of both. Thus while his habits were distinctly Austrian, his tastes were to some degree coloured by his father's descriptions of what to old Mr. Radford always remained "home life." As far as could be judged as yet there was in his nature none of that mysterious quality designated as "*das Britische Phlegma*," but a good deal of the true British sturdiness, and while light-hearted as any full-blood Austrian, there had

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so far been no symptoms of the dangerous Austrian *Leichtsinn.* There were, indeed, admirers who asserted that Alfred had managed to pick out the desirable qualities of both nations and to pass over the undesirable ones, but generally these were people who ultimately counted upon borrowing money from Mr. Radford, and whose opinions were therefore not entirely free from prejudice. To an uninterested spectator it appeared undecided what sort of a man he would ultimately become. That he should so far have borne himself well at all points was scarcely to be counted in his favour, seeing that, under present circumstances, it was almost easier to behave well than badly.

Alfred never guessed how wise was his father's resolve to send him to the army, nor, for the matter of that, had Mr. Radford himself any suspicion of the wisdom of his own act. He had always heard that there was nothing like the army for polishing up a young man, and as Hilda would not hear of a son of hers serving in any army but the Austrian, it naturally followed that Alfred became an Austrian officer.

Alfred went readily, though without any special enthusiasm at first, well understanding that his military career was not meant to be the object of his life, but only a stage upon the road. It was only within his new surroundings that his ambition took

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sudden fire, causing him to feel so acutely such remarks as that unfortunate one reported to him by Nessi Meerkatz.

Brought face to face with the results of his own rashness, Alfred began by feeling entirely helpless, as all those must on whose notice sorrow and want —even the sorrow and want of others—have never before obtruded themselves. He had always had a certain difficulty in realising that most other people were not as well off as he, whether morally or financially; and while never advertising his good luck, had enjoyed it without reflection and with a frank geniality which disarmed envy, not looking upon it as luck, but rather as the natural course of things.

That had been until now; but quite suddenly, within the space of a few hours, his own good fortune, as weighed against the fate of another, began to appear to him in its true colours. A burning desire for atonement took possession of him; all the more burning because as yet there was absolutely nothing to be done but to be patient, Dr. Bruck having for the present flatly forbidden all visits to the injured man. Amputation had not proved necessary, for which small mercy Radford probably felt more thankful than did Milnovics himself; but the unavoidable fever which had set in, together with the stage of inflammation, had proved unusually acute, so necessarily mental ex-

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citement stood first upon the list of forbidden things.

Since learning from the doctor those few terrible details with regard to Milnovics's history, Radford had felt himself to be guilty not of the ruin of an individual, but of a whole family. But there must exist some manner of atonement. Now that he had recovered from the first stupor of the blow, his incorrigibly sanguine nature was already beginning to catch sight of all sorts of favourable possibilities. Not that he inclined to think lightly of the matter—or if so, only just lightly enough to keep him from despairing—but that his inexperience could not realise the details of what must now necessarily follow. During this fearfully long fortnight of waiting he had hatched a plan which appeared to himself so beautifully simple and so entirely satisfactory at all points, that he felt no very serious misgivings as to its acceptance. It seemed to him that the moment for laying the matter before Milnovics would never arrive, but nevertheless one afternoon about the middle of April, he found himself somewhat nervously mounting the wooden staircase of Abraham Meerkatz's house, while carefully repeating to himself Dr. Bruck's strict injunctions as to the avoidance of all excitement.

Milnovics, his long narrow face grown yet narrower, and looking all the more colourless in con-

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trast to the stubbly black beard of a fortnight's growth, lay propped against his pillows. As Radford entered, a tall, stooping figure in a long black habit rose from a chair beside the bed. Radford's first impression was of a nun, but looking more closely he perceived that this was no nun, but an ethereal-looking old man with a delicate face of a wonderful waxen pallor, and covered with a network of tiny wrinkles. He wore the dress of a Ruthenian priest, and his well-shaped and remarkably small head was so completely covered by a black silk handkerchief, tied nightcap-wise under his chin, that not even a single wisp of snow-white hair had had the chance of escaping,—for that the hair must be as white as snow was written quite plainly in the wrinkles, as well as in the tired, grey eyes. The impression produced by the strange figure was partly pathetic and partly grotesque.

"This is my father," said Milnovics, looking at Radford; "and this," he added somewhat more quickly, glancing towards the old priest, "is—one of my comrades."

"Please sit down again, I did not mean to disturb you," said Radford, instinctively moving back towards the door.

It was the old priest who interfered.

"It is no disturbance," he protested, in a thin, musical voice and somewhat broken German. "I

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have talked to him quite long enough, longer probably than is good for him. A little conversation with a comrade will be a pleasant change. We old men are not apt to be amusing," he added, showing his almost toothless gums in a faint smile, while with a feeble, friendly nod towards Radford, he slipped quietly through the door and into the next room.

Radford stood looking at the door after it had closed. When his eyes returned to the bed he saw that Milnovics was watching him.

"Is that your father?"

"I have told you that it is my father. Why are you looking so astonished?"

"I was wondering——"

"Perhaps you are wondering at his appearance," said Milnovics, a little sharply. "He suffers from rheumatism in his head, that is why he is obliged to keep it covered."

Again he looked searchingly at his comrade, as though to detect in Radford's face the faintest sign of a derisive smile. It was impossible for him not to be aware of the effect which that long, night-capped figure was apt to produce upon strangers. But Radford's thoughts were elsewhere.

"Does your father know who I am?"

"I suppose so; I told him that you were my comrade."

"But did you tell him *which* of your comrades

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I am? No, he could not have caught my name; I remember now, you did not even mention it. Why, he spoke to me as he might have spoken to any good Samaritan come to nurse you. Milnovics, this is frightful; I cannot stand that look of his,—that smile. If he had flown out at me and called me names I know I should have felt ever so much better. He *must* fly out at me if he knows who I am. Let me tell him, please."

He had already made one step towards the second door when Milnovics's voice interfered.

"Leave my father alone," he said, quickly. "Why do you want to torment him? You must not go into that room."

The colour was mounting to his forehead as he spoke, and at sight of it Dr. Bruck's strict injunctions rose again in Radford's mind. Silent and submissive he sat down upon the chair beside the bed. How he had pictured that meeting! How steeled himself to bear the wrath of a righteously indignant father, who, even if deterred by his position from openly cursing him, would yet probably like best to excommunicate him henceforward from all Christian society! And was this to be all?—that meek smile and the benevolent nod? Even though his name had not been pronounced, ought not the man of God to have instinctively recognised him as the criminal?

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He had come here with his plan in his pocket, as it were, and more than ready to pop out of it,—so it had seemed; but from the moment that he had again seen Milnovics's face and had caught sight of the stiff arm lying upon the coverlet, his courage had unaccountably begun to sink a very little. He decided that it would be wiser not to come to the point immediately, but rather to start with some other subject and gradually to work up to his real object.

"When does Dr. Bruck mean to let you out of bed?" he began, at random.

"In the course of this week, I believe."

"But not out of your room yet, I suppose."

Radford took a look round the room. It struck him as a peculiarly dreary cage to be shut up in during this glorious spring weather. A defective cane chair stood conspicuous beside the window, and, with the exception of its fellow which he at this moment occupied, formed the only sitting accommodation of the apartment.

"But surely you will want something more comfortable than that if you are to be kept locked up here," he observed, looking almost indignantly at the chair. "Nobody could sit for hours on a thing like that."

"I have a sofa in the next room," said Milnovics, evasively.

"That narow bit of a bench? Why, that's

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worse than the chair; it's all one can do to balance oneself upon it. I've often meant to ask you where on earth you picked up that awful piece of furniture—I mean," he added, growing suddenly very red as he saw Milnovics's face darkening, "of course the sofa is all right, I suppose, when one is accustomed to it, but for a person just out of bed it doesn't strike me somehow as being exactly the thing. It's rather slippery, don't you know."

Milnovics said nothing, and Radford took another hasty look round the room. He had been in this same room before, without ever having noticed any of the dreariness of its details. The iron wash-hand-stand from which most of the enamel had already crumbled, the curtainless windows, the little mirror on the wall, with its blistered wooden frame, had never before attracted his attention, just as little as the rickety sofa in the next room would have done if he had not happened personally to have experienced its discomfort. But today, every one of these details seemed to have become all at once hugely conspicuous. He even observed that the comb which lay upon the wash-hand-stand had lost three of its teeth. The single thing that resembled an ornament was the picture of a black-faced Madonna, painted upon wood, against a background of gold, and supported by a wooden shelf in a corner of the room. It was so

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unexpected, and looked so out of place upon the bare walls, that Radford could not immediately take his eyes off it.

Presently his train of thought drew him back to the contemplation of the cane chair.

"It's quite impossible," he broke out aloud. "Milnovics, you must let me send over an arm-chair; I've got one which I never use—upon my honour, I never do,—and you positively must have something better than this to sit on—even Dr. Bruck will tell you so."

"I am going to hire a chair. Aaron Blauwurz lets out furniture, you know."

"Yes, and moths into the bargain, not to mention other species of insects. Nonsense, Milnovics, you *must* let me send over that chair."

"I don't require the chair," said Milnovics, with a touch of irritation. "I have already settled with Aaron Blauwurz."

The sharpness of the tone caused Radford to sink into discouraged silence, but not for long.

"Well, if you have got a chair already," he began, after a minute, though in a tone of much less assurance, "you will at least need a footstool,—and, perhaps a low basket-table for keeping your newspaper at your elbow, don't you know? Aaron Blauwurz has certainly got no basket-tables, and I just happen to have one which is always standing

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in my way,—and you would positively be obliging me if——"

"I cannot oblige you, Radford. Many thanks, but I require none of these things."

"None at all?" repeated Radford, looking once more disconsolately around the room in the vague hope of discovering some further excuse for an offer. Excuses there would in truth have been enough, but they were not available, for it could scarcely be quite the thing to offer his comrade a new mirror or a blind for his window.

"Tell me, Milnovics," he said, speaking upon some impulse of curiosity, as his eyes once more rested upon the black-faced Madonna in the corner, "have you always had that picture there? I did not notice it before. I positively did not know you were so pious."

"I am not pious," replied Milnovics.

"But that picture——"

"That picture hangs there because my father occasionally visits me, and he likes to see it in its place."

"You must be very fond of your father," said Radford, warmly, "and I suppose he is very fond of you, and yet," he added in a lower tone, "he seems to be bearing it wonderfully."

"He is accustomed to bearing things," replied Milnovics, almost indifferently.

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"Does he know that—that you will have to leave the army?"

"Yes, he knows it."

"Then by rights he ought to want to kill me, or at least to cut off my right arm. Properly speaking, I have got no right to my arm, since I have deprived you of the use of yours. It was I who did that, Milnovics, remember!"

Milnovics was stroking his black, unkempt moustache with his left hand, and said nothing.

"Your arm is useless, and your career is cut short," went on Radford, eagerly, bending a little forward as he spoke; "and it was I who did it—you must remember that!"

The other went on looking before him in silence.

"For Heaven's sake, say something,—was it not I?"

"Do you think I am likely to forget?" said Milnovics, almost in a whisper, and with one quick, fierce glance into his comrade's face.

"Ah, you admit it,—and not by mere accident, but literally and positively through my own unpardonable imprudence."

Radford paused for a few moments, rapidly reviewing the arguments which had been prepared for the occasion.

"Tell me another thing, Milnovics," he began,

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after that pause; "supposing you had happened to smash up something belonging to some one else,—I mean if you had broken the neck of a horse belonging to one of the other fellows, or if you had borrowed some one's riding-whip and snapped it in two, what would you naturally do?"

Milnovics looked at him in astonishment, without immediately replying.

"You would feel bound to replace the horse, would you not, or to buy a new riding-whip?"

"I suppose I should," replied Milnovics, still watching the other's face curiously.

"And if the case was reversed, and your whip had been broken, you wouldn't think twice about accepting a new one?"

"No."

"No? Well, then, listen to me!" said Radford, triumphantly. "What I want to do is not a bit different from what you say you would feel bound to do. You admit that I have smashed up your career; well, then, I too feel bound to replace it."

"I don't understand you," said Milnovics, coldly.

"You shall immediately,—wait a little. My plan is simply this: since I, by my act, have deprived you of your lieutenant's charge and consequently also of your lieutenant's pay, I wish by another act to return to you what still can be returned, that is unfortunately only the pay. It is

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exactly the same really as if I had broken your riding-whip and were giving you another—don't you understand? It is really quite simple. Even my father has made no objections; I told him all about it in my last letter, and I have got his consent."

Literally speaking this was true. During the past fortnight Alfred had attempted to relieve his mind by taking his father into his confidence, and by appealing somewhat incoherently to the paternal generosity towards his injured comrade. Old Mr. Radford did not follow all the arguments, but he gathered that his son was in an over-excited state of mind, and readily gave Alfred *carte blanche* to do whatever his conscience might demand of him. Neither had he any serious apprehensions as to the result. Alfred always had been easily moved, and, judging from experience, he calculated that the first passion of remorse would be spent before the reply to his letter had reached him. The only mistake Mr. Radford made was in forgetting that although he had often before seen his son carried away by his feelings, those feelings had never been very serious ones, seeing that all his life up to this point had been one long play-time.

While he detailed his present plan Milnovics's expression underwent a change which it would not have been easy to define.

"So the idea is that I am to draw my pay from

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you or from your father, instead of from the Emperor?" he remarked, when Radford had done speaking.

"Yes, that is exactly the idea; you couldn't have put it more clearly. It is perfectly logical, is it not?"

"Not perfectly; in order to be quite logical I ought to swear allegiance to you, instead of to the Emperor, since I am to be your lieutenant. And tell me, by the by, am I always to remain a lieutenant? Is there no advancement in your service?"

"Of course there is," said Radford, eagerly, feeling at once both astonished and pleased at the other's tone; it seemed almost as though there were going to be no struggle at all. "Of course the pay will increase just the same as if you were in the army and still advancing. You agree to my plan, do you not?"

"Wait a little; I want to hear a little more first. You mean to make me advance at a proper rate, I hope,—and how far do you propose to let me get? Is there any chance of my becoming a general?"

"As far as my means will reach; the last penny of my fortune exactly represents the limits of what I wish to do for you. I want you to believe that I would gladly give it all up at this moment, only to undo the misfortune I have brought about."

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He spoke so earnestly that, somewhat to his annoyance, he felt the tears rise to his eyes.

"You do believe me, do you not? And you do agree to my proposal?"

Milnovics put his head further back upon the pillow, and, with his eyes upon the ceiling, seemed to be stifling an abrupt attack of laughter.

"I did not think that anything could amuse me now, but really, Radford, you are quite irresistible. It is an excellent joke,—there,—that's enough for the present,—we may as well talk seriously if we are to talk at all."

"A joke?" repeated Radford, taken suddenly aback; "you surely cannot suppose that I meant this as a joke?"

"Possibly not, but I certainly take it as one."

"And you will not agree to my proposal?"

"No, I will not,—since you seem to expect a serious answer. But I am quite ready to admit that you had no intention of insulting me with your offer."

"But, Milnovics," began the distressed Radford, "you surely admitted——"

"Be quiet!" said Milnovics, peremptorily. "I have kept my temper so far, but everything has limits. I tell you plainly, once for all, that I will not accept any money from you, either now or at any future time and under whatever ingenious ex-

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cuses you attempt to thrust it upon me. Is that clear enough?"

"But, Milnovics," Radford began again, and then at sight of his comrade's heightened colour Dr. Bruck's injunctions rose once more to his mind, and once more he felt himself effectually silenced.

"I will not press you further upon this point—at present," he began after a long pause, "but surely there are other ways in which I might be of help to you. Probably—I mean possibly—you may wish to look out for some other occupation. My mother has a great many influential relations,—perhaps she might be able to procure for you some appointment which would suit you."

"It is very obliging of you to suggest it, but I do not intend to appeal to your mother."

"Then do you mean that I can do absolutely nothing for you?"

"I have not asked you to do anything for me."

"Unfortunately you have not. All that remains for me is to be your friend; that at least you cannot forbid me."

Milnovics had turned his head upon the pillow and was looking straight at the wall.

"Milnovics," said Radford, almost a little timidly, "if it is not unpleasant to you, I wish you would call me by my name—Alfred,—it would make me feel somehow as though we were a little

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nearer together, and as though I had a better right to render you some small service now and then. You will let me be your friend, will you not?"

Milnovics turned his head again sharply, and, raising himself somewhat upon his pillows, began to talk rapidly and low, with flushed face and shining eyes.

"Leave me alone, Radford; it is all the mercy I ask of you. You have got my forgiveness, but in the name of heaven, spare me your friendship! I cannot bear everything; I am not like my father. Do you not understand that the very sight of you must always keep the wound open? I beg of you to leave me alone. Do you think I do not understand what all this means? You have been making inquiries, and you have found out that I am poor,—that we are all poor, and you want to force your help upon me, in some shape or other; but I tell you that I want your friendship just as little as I want your footstools, or your money, or your—pity. That which I have to bear I can bear best alone. I ask you again, will you leave me alone?"

"No, I will not leave you alone," said Radford, rising from his chair under the impression of some new emotion. His eyes were shining, and the colour had mounted to his face as he returned his comrade's full gaze. "You shall not forbid me to

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do that which I know to be not only my duty but also my right. You will not have my friendship, you say,—well, then, what I say is, that I shall yet become your friend and gain you for a friend, in spite of everything, in spite of your very self. Let it be a trial of strength between us,—it is no matter, I know that I shall conquer in the end. I shall not leave you alone—I tell it you to your face—I shall follow you always with my thoughts, if I cannot do so with my eyes; I shall never cease to invent and combine until I have discovered some means of doing you some good. If ever you are in want of a helping hand, it shall be my hand and no other that helps you. I can understand that you should hate me, but you have no right to repulse me; you have no right to deprive me of the means of repairing my own fault, at least to some small extent, and of re-establishing myself in my own eyes. Do you hear me, Milnovics, do you understand?"

It was hard to say whether Milnovics had heard. While Radford was speaking he had sunk back upon his pillow and again turned his face towards the wall. He now lay immovable, without response and without sign.

"Do you understand?" repeated Radford,—then seeing that there was still no movement in the bed and no break in the sullen silence, he

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stood for only one moment longer, looking down upon the disabled man not with sorrow this time, but rather with a glance which was on fire with the joy of a real resolution. The next moment, without another word, he turned and left the room.

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CHAPTER V.

Radford's declaration was followed by immediate action. Had he been a little older or a little wiser he would doubtless have set to work on a totally different method, and by biding his time would probably have made more speed in the end; but being such as he was, he did not stop to lay ambushes or dig mines, but, having collected his ammunition, began straightway to open an exceedingly lively fire on the citadel of Milnovics's friendship.

The first shot was discharged in the shape of a splendidly comfortable rocking-chair which, on the very morrow of his visit, he ordered his servant to carry to Milnovics's lodging. The servant was back again in half an hour, bringing both the chair and a message to the effect that Lieutenant Milnovics was much obliged, but that sitting in that sort of chair always made him feel sea-sick. The next experiment was a packet of books which, as the accompanying note explained, Mrs. Radford happened to have sent her son lately, but which

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the latter could not possibly find time to read. The books were returned upon Radford's hands with as little delay as the rocking-chair, for Dr. Bruck had forbidden the patient to read; while a box of choice cigars shared the fate of both rocking-chair and books,—the patient had likewise been forbidden to smoke.

But even after the failure of the cigars, Radford was by no means at his wits' end. Never before had he suspected himself of such an inventive faculty as that which now came to his aid, causing him to catch sight of the most out-of-the-way chances of rendering some service either directly or indirectly to the convalescent, either with or without his knowledge. There was a good deal of indelicacy in all this, but much more of genuine eagerness, and withal such an absence of ostentation and so steadfast a good humour in the face of continued failure, that though the lookers-on might criticise, they could not avoid smiling leniently. Perfect tact is not generally an attribute of raw inexperience, and Radford, moreover, being robust in all his instincts, had not hitherto been given to studying the nicer shades of a somewhat morbid sensibility. There were not awanting voices to tell the *Engländer* that he was a fool for his pains, and that no one but just an *Engländer* could be so pigheaded as to persist in his efforts, for the weeks

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that had passed since the duel had brought about a gradual but certain change in the attitude of the regiment towards the event. The sympathy for Milnovics's misfortune had begun by being just as unanimous as the blame for "Rahdfort's" imprudence, as was indeed unavoidable; but when the unfortunate man is so persistently ungracious and the imprudent man so truly remorseful, a modification both of sympathy and of blame is almost as unavoidable. Milnovics had always been too taciturn to be popular, whereas Radford, here as everywhere, was a general favourite; the glamour of his wealth and position probably did the rest. How it came about nobody could exactly say, but before a month from the fatal day had elapsed the mutual position of the two men had been so thoroughly exchanged that, from being the martyr, Milnovics had in the public opinion been degraded to the rank of offender, while the original offender, without either his consent or knowledge, was now generally looked upon as the martyr.

Before the end of April Radford was temporarily ordered off to one of the outlying stations of the regiment. Returning to Lohatyn a fortnight later, his first thought was of Milnovics. The answers which met his inquiries struck him with something like consternation. Milnovics was no longer here; he had gone home to his relations

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on what was called six months' sick-leave, but which every one recognised as the legitimate method of drawing the pay for one extra half-year before finally quitting the army.

"He has chosen this moment on purpose," said Radford, in angry disappointment; "he has given me the slip; but he shall not escape me because of that—no, he shall not!"

With a sense of relief he remembered having heard that Milnovics's home was at no great distance from Lohatyn. Immediately he set about making more particular inquiries, and learnt to his satisfaction that an hour and a half of hard riding would take him to the village of Berenów, where Father Floryan Milnovics's living was situated.

There now followed a few days of most unusual indecision and of somewhat mixed sensations. The recollection of that tall bowed figure, and of the waxen face with the tired, grey eyes which he had seen as in a vision, rose again and seemed to be barring his passage. The grief which he had read there touched him as something almost too sacred to be intruded upon.

Having twice had his horse saddled for the ride to Berenów and twice countermanded his own order, there came to him on the morning of the fourth day a thought which seemed to throw the

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required light upon his perplexities. Was not the name of the feeling that was holding him back false rather than true shame? This suggestion settled the matter. From the moment that he suspected himself of wishing to spare himself rather than Father Floryan, his duty appeared to him clear. On the afternoon of that day the horse was once more saddled, and Radford started for Berenów, fully determined to bear the whole brunt of the reproaches with which the afflicted family could scarcely fail to receive him.

It was a perfect evening in the latter half of May, and the monotony of the straight highroad was gratefully relieved by the pink flush of an occasional apple-tree among the limes and birches which stood at irregular intervals to the right and to the left. The nearer the road drew to Berenów the closer did the straggly avenue become and the more frequent the fruit-trees, until at length, towards sunset, the rider made his entry under triumphal arches of pink and white, which, since he happened to be the only moving thing within sight, seemed to have been erected especially in his honour, and were ready at the lightest puff of air to shower their blossoms upon his head and shoulders, and even into his pockets, had he been so minded.

"They don't know who I am," reflected Rad-

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ford, while with a whimsical fancy he shook his head at the dazzling pear and cherry trees; "they have set their hearts upon crowning me, as though I were a hero returning from the battle-field, whereas I am a criminal, and scarcely well on the battle-field as yet. They should be throwing stones at me, not flowers. Why, it looks for all the world as though I were a prince in a fairy-tale on my way to fetch my bride to church."

He laughed aloud at his own idea, and then checked himself abruptly at the sound of his voice. This surely was not the right mood in which to enter on his mission of to-day. He should be thinking of the serious side of life, whereas these blossoms and this soft evening air, and even the luscious green in the roadside ditch, all tended to put forward the gay side against a man's will, and despite of whatever might be in his mind. Amidst the gentle intoxication of a spring day, it is hard for youth and health to remain perfectly sober, very hard for a man to keep his eyes shut to his own good fortune, merely because some one else has been unfortunate.

Thanks to the evening light and to the profusion of blossoms on all sides, the loose labyrinth of poverty-stricken huts was looking its best to-day. The Ruthenian Pentecost was only just over, and the birch-boughs, with which it is the fashion to

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deck out the houses for the "green festival," were still fresh and juicy, imparting a distinctly festive character to the straw-thatched roofs from which they hung in glistening green fringes. The fancy pursued Radford that everything had been prepared expressly for his entry. Even the young families of rosy pigs and canary-coloured chickens that met him at every corner, seemed to have turned out especially in his honour.

By the time Radford had dismounted in front of a decrepit gate of plain deal boards, every urchin in the place seemed to have put in an appearance for the purpose of swelling his *cortège;* a silent and respectful *cortège,* without a stocking or a shoe amongst them, with unwashed faces but awestruck eyes, and who, although apparently deeply observant, never got so far as to exchange the results of those observations even in the most unobtrusive of whispers.

What had been pointed out to Radford as the *plebanija* (priest's house) appeared to be simply another of the peasant houses, with the difference that it possessed whole windows and a brick chimney. Within the gate he found himself in a large but apparently thinly stocked farmyard, in which nettles were evidently the most thriving article. Right through their rank growth a path had been trodden to where, somewhere about the middle of

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the space, the beam of a draw-well was reared against the sky. From a muddy-looking pond at the further end there came filing along a family of half-grown ducks, not one of which had yet attained the dignity of a graceful waddle, painfully conscious of the immensity of their feet, visibly embarrassed by the shortness of their tails. A long tumble-down shed ran along one side of the yard, and in one of the scattered straw-heaps two rather thin pigs were wallowing.

Radford looked about him with a sinking heart. On everything that he saw not only was poverty and even want written in plain letters, but a hundred details which he was scarcely aware of noticing, indirectly offended some innate sense of order and accuracy inherited from British forefathers. Could this be Milnovics's home, the place where he was to spend the remainder of a life only just begun? No, at any price, it must not be.

The door stood open, but from within there came no sign of life, and Radford, having fastened his horse to the paling, where it stood stamping impatiently and shaking out the apple-blossoms that still clung to its chestnut mane, decided upon following the example of a young hen who, being apparently well acquainted with the premises, was just now mounting the doorstep. Following the hen closely he first found himself in a brick-paved

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passage, and from there was led into the kitchen, at which point, however, his feathered guide abandoned him in order to throw herself upon a dish of cold potatoes standing uncovered upon the table, and on which three sisters of her own were already feasting.

"Is there any one here?" Radford asked of the walls, and at the loudly spoken question the silent house awoke suddenly into life. From behind a door opposite a quick whispering arose, somebody peeped through a chink and disappeared again with a breathless exclamation. Steps were heard to cross the passage outside, but before Radford had time to turn round they were gone again. More doors were opened and more startled faces became visible for a passing second, but evidently no one had as yet found courage to face such an unusual thing as a visitor in uniform. It was not until several more minutes had passed that a barefooted servant-girl, of apparently about eight years old, came to the surface, and, with burning blushes, led Radford into a large square room with the lowest ceiling he had ever seen. Here, before anything further happened, he had ample time to come to the conclusion that the narrow slippery sofa which formed the principal article of furniture, must be the twin-brother of the one in Milnovics's lodging, as well as to count the various circles left upon the

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polish of the table, probably by glasses of hot tea. In one corner of the room a small oil-lamp burned before the same sort of religious picture that he had seen in Milnovics's bedroom, and here as there it was the only ornament.

Radford's heart sank lower still while he sat and looked anxiously towards the door, half hoping, and yet more than half afraid, to see the old *Popa* enter.

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CHAPTER VI.

When some one entered at last it was not the old *Popa*, but apparently his female counterpart. This was an elderly woman in an ostentatiously new black dress, very badly made, and of which some of the buttons had not been fastened. She had the same long, narrow figure as the *Popa*, held rigidly upright instead of being bowed, and the same cut of face as he; the difference being only that whereas his features seemed to have been moulded out of wax hers might have been cut out of stone. Her instinct of hospitality was evidently struggling to get the upper hand of the annoyance of having had to change her dress in such a hurry; moreover, to judge from the condition of her finger-tips, she had evidently been interrupted in the kneading of some sort of dough.

"I am a comrade of Lieutenant Milnovics," said Radford, having named himself, "and I am come to inquire after his health."

"You are the first who has taken the trouble to do so," replied the elderly lady in a grating voice,

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while her hard, grey eyes seemed to be examining the visitor with some suspicion. She paused for a moment and then added, "I presume that this inquiry is not the sole object of your riding eight miles?"

"I would gladly have ridden twenty with the same intention. But why do you ask me this?"

"Because it is not the way of the world to take trouble when other people alone are concerned. It looks well to appear charitable, but I have never known a charity yet behind which some self-interest was not lurking. If you are speaking the truth you are an exception, and I do not believe in exceptions. That is why I asked you."

Radford gazed at the stony-faced and distinctly unceremonious old woman with a feeling of surprise not unmixed with amusement. Unwittingly she had given him exactly the opening which he wanted.

"Madam," he began presently,—he supposed he was safe in saying Madam,—"I will tell you the truth: I am no exception,—there *is* a self-interest lurking behind my action. I have not come here merely for Milnovics's sake, but also for my own. You probably do not know who I am. You say that I am the first of his comrades who has taken the trouble to come, but you do not know that none of the others have the same reason

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for coming that I have. It was with me that he fought that unhappy duel, and therefore it is I who am the cause of his misfortune."

He paused with a flush on his face and looked expectantly towards her, prepared for the worst that could come in the way of reproaches. But she also was looking expectantly towards him, as though waiting to hear more.

"Well?" she said as he did not speak; "you have not yet told me what your own interest is in coming here?"

"Not told you?" he stammered; "but did you not just hear me say that it was I who have disabled his arm? and do you not understand that my self-reproaches would kill me if I did not do all that is in my power for the man whom I have injured?"

"Ah, so you reproach yourself?" remarked the old lady in the same harsh, unmodulated voice. "That is because you are young. When you are a little older you will see that such self-reproach is mere foolishness. All that talk about freewill is nonsense; we are nothing but instruments, and we can do nothing but what is ordained, somewhere or other—perhaps in heaven or possibly in hell—that we shall do. It may amuse you to call yourself the cause of his misfortune, but you are really nothing at all, nothing but an inert mass

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in the hand of—whoever settles our fates. If it had not been you it would have been another. Therefore it would have been very unreasonable of you to ride out here merely because of a feeling of self-reproach."

There was a bitter smile upon her dry lips, and her glance added very plainly: "But I do not by any means take you for such a fool as that; there certainly is something more behind this."

"But I am forgetting my duties," she said, rising stiffly; "you must be thirsty after those eight miles. I do not know why Marysia is not bringing the *samovar* (tea-urn)."

Radford let her go out without another word. He had hoped that she would begin by weeping, and end by granting him her forgiveness, but evidently there was no chance of either, for not only did those grey eyes, as he had seen them now, seem incapable of shedding tears, but, according to her creed, there simply was nothing to forgive.

When several more minutes had passed, the door opened once more. Radford turned round quickly, but it was not yet Father Floryan, it was a woman of somewhere about thirty, with sleek black hair, and a small, mobile, yellow face. She came in briskly, almost jauntily, smiling somewhat nervously at Radford, before she had quite closed

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the door. While still crossing the room she began to talk in short jerky sentences.

"You are Stepan's comrade? Yes, I have already heard. Please do not stand. This is very kind. The *samovar* will be here immediately. You have ridden out from Lohatyn?"

"Yes, I came to inquire after Milnovics's health, but I have not yet heard how he is."

"Oh, his health is very good. That is to say, he has had a relapse, but that is all the better. A recovery should not be too fast, do you not think so? I am sure he will be delighted to see you."

"And I am sure he will not," said Radford, almost bitterly for him.

"This event must have been a great blow to the family," he added tentatively. Possibly this lively and voluble person—a sister or a cousin, he supposed—might listen with more sympathy to the confession he was dying to make, and which at the first attempt had proved so complete a failure.

To his consternation she began to laugh, not very gaily, it is true, and in rather too shrill a tone to be perfectly natural, but it was nevertheless enough to disconcert him.

"A blow, yes, of course it was a blow," she said, and her laughter broke off as abruptly as it had begun. "It was so sudden as to be almost funny.

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I don't think we any of us quite believed it at first. I cried a good deal on the first day, but there isn't much sense in crying, and, after all, a great many things that look like misfortunes really are blessings—disguised blessings, I think people call them. Now, for instance, if Stepan had gone on being a soldier he might have had to go to the war, and there he might have been killed, while now we shall have him at home with us always."

"But with one arm only," said Radford, gloomily.

"Yes; but is it not better to have him with one arm than to lose him with both?"

She had grown suddenly serious, and was looking at Radford with anxious, questioning eyes.

"She also does not know who I am," he reflected; "I must tell her the truth."

"Does that mean," he asked aloud, "that you would be able to forgive the man who did him this harm?"

"I have forgiven him long ago,—if you will call it a harm; but I have told you already that for anything I know it may be a blessing."

"Then it is me whom you have forgiven, for it was I who fought with him."

Instantly the small face began to work, and the nervous laugh broke out again.

"You! Oh, this is terribly funny. Why did

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you not tell me? I never guessed that it was you. Is that why you are looking so distressed?"

"Do you expect me to look cheerful?"

"Why not? That duel may have saved Stepan from far greater misfortunes, from far bloodier wounds, and in that case you really are his benefactor, don't you see? So why shouldn't you be cheerful? My belief is that things generally are best as they are,—at any rate it's better to look at it that way," she added, with a just susceptible sinking of her voice.

"Possibilities can never console me for facts," said Radford almost hotly.

"Better look at it that way—far better look at it that way," murmured the black-haired woman in reply, and hastily rose, adding something about its being incredible how long a time Marysia took to heat the *samovar*.

Once outside the door she stood still, and her small, crumpled face grew still smaller and more crumpled up, almost as though she were on the point of bursting into tears; but happening at that moment to put her hand to her throat, she became aware that in her hurry she had forgotten to put on her brooch—a discovery which immediately gave her thoughts another turn. With a look of annoyance on her face she went quickly to her own room.

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For Radford there followed another interval of solitude.

"Every one in this house seems to have a theory of his own," he reflected, "and none of them agree with mine."

Then he sat looking at the closed door and wondering what was coming next.

What came next was an insignificant-looking man, whose age was difficult to determine, in priestly attire, and with a spiritless expression of countenance. He had been busy with his collar outside the door, and was not quite done with it at the moment of entering. He approached Radford with the timid suggestion that they should go together to meet Stepan and his father, who had walked up to the old church, but who must be on their way back by this time. It appeared that the rate at which Marysia was getting on with the *samovar* promised to give them ample time for this excursion.

The wooded hillock on which the old church stood sloped down till close behind the line of sheds, and formed on this side the natural boundary of the farmyard. At the further end, beyond the well and the duck-pond, there stood a large group, almost a small forest, of very tall and very thin ash-trees, which had evidently been planted much too thickly, and had therefore not been able

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to expand. It was towards these trees that the man in priestly attire led the way. The ascent was easier from that side, he explained.

"If he isn't a brother, I don't know where to put him," reflected Radford, "and yet I was told there were no brothers."

Judging from his experiences to-day, introductions were not the fashion here, and yet they undoubtedly had their advantages, as Radford had time to reflect while picking his way between the puddles and manure-heaps of the farmyard and while his companion walked listlessly beside him. Radford looked at him once or twice questioningly. This time he was determined to go straight to the point; no doubt a man would understand him better than those women could.

"This is a great misfortune," he began abruptly.

"What is a great misfortune?"

"Why, this disablement of Milnovics's arm."

"Yes, I suppose it is what one would call a great misfortune," agreed his companion without much interest.

"Let me begin by telling you at once that it was I who challenged him to the duel which ended so unhappily."

"Ah, indeed,—you had better step aside or you will tread in that puddle."

"Tell me," said Radford, earnestly, "please tell

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me whether you really feel no anger, no indignation at all against me? You are such strange people here, I cannot understand you. Do you not think that it would be natural to feel indignation?"

"Yes, I suppose it would be natural," replied the dreary man, reflectively; "but then, you see," and he turned a pair of spiritless, neutral-tinted eyes upon Radford, "I have long ago given up being indignant with anybody or anything. I do not think it repays the trouble."

Radford was silent, feeling that there was nothing which he could say.

"One misfortune more or less does not seem to make much difference now," went on the other, in his colourless voice. "My own misfortune is quite as large as Stepan's, and yet I have had to live through mine, just as he will have to live through his."

"Are you unhappy?" asked Radford, a little shyly.

"I have been unhappy. It was my one great wish to become a priest."

"But are you not a priest?"

"No, I am a deacon, and my wife is dead, so a deacon I must remain till the end of my life. With us a widower may not receive orders, you know."

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He sighed heavily, roused momentarily from his apathy by some passing recollection.

They had now reached the ash-trees and began threading their way between the straight, thin stems. Something that Radford first took for a heap of clothes was lying at the foot of one of the trees. As they came nearer he perceived that a young woman was sitting there fast asleep.

"It is only Jusia," said the deacon, turning to Radford. "She often sits here."

"Go to sleep again, Jusia; we are not going to disturb you," he added to the puffy-cheeked, unhealthy-looking young girl, who had opened a pair of drowsy eyes at their approach, speaking as if to a child.

At the same moment Radford caught sight of Milnovics and his father coming from the opposite side. They were talking earnestly and did not observe him until they had almost met.

Milnovics looked up quickly and flushed vividly at the sight of Radford. Though he did not speak, Radford understood the language of that first glance.

"Must you pursue me even here?" it said quite unmistakably. And in his heart he answered, "Yes, I must pursue you even here, even until you yourself surrender yourself to me."

Of the half-hour that followed one moment only

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remained for ever vivid in Radford's memory. Milnovics, without having done more than acknowledge Radford's greeting, had returned to the house together with the deacon, who had promised to give a call, in case by any chance Marysia should yet be ready with the *samovar*. The host and his visitor were walking slowly to and fro between the straight, smooth tree-stems, as though in a many-pillared corridor. For the first time Radford was quite alone with the old *Popa*, for even Jusia had disappeared. For several minutes he was silent, longing and yet not daring to make one last and supreme confession, one final attempt to have his position as a criminal openly recognised and clearly established.

It was with an immense effort that he began at last to speak, watching, as well as his own emotion would allow him, the changes on Father Floryan's face. These changes were swift. Upon an almost childish surprise there followed a gentle distress, which again gave way to a look of mild concern in the eyes turned upon the speaker. When he ceased Father Floryan put out an unsteady hand and feebly pressed Radford's fingertips.

"Poor child, poor child," he murmured just above his breath, "you must have suffered greatly."

"What does it matter what *I* have suffered?"

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retorted Radford, almost with indignation; "I brought it on myself, but you—you and your son —are both unhappy through my fault."

"I am not unhappy," said Father Floryan, mildly.

"Are you too going to tell me that you do not feel this blow?"

"I feel," said the old *Popa* in a whisper, and glancing fearfully around him, almost as though he were afraid of being overheard, "but I submit. It has been so ordained by *Him*."

"And you are still capable of being happy?"

"There can be no unhappiness where there is peace. Believe me, my son," and the trembling fingers passed over Radford's sleeve with a timidly caressing touch, "perfect peace lives through everything."

Radford walked on again in silence. This was not what he had looked for, not what could satisfy him. Was there positively no way of rousing this tranquil old man to even the mildest expression of indignation?

"And does your son share your view of the case?" he inquired moodily, after a minute or two.

Another light cloud passed over the old priest's face.

"Stepan is still too young, he has not yet found perfect peace, but it will come with the years."

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"Has he not spoken to you about me?"

"He has not; but I see, alas! that he broods. I did not know until to-day who had been his adversary in that duel—may God forgive both him and you the sin that was there committed!"

"And you do not know what we fought about?"

"I know nothing. Stepan does not like to be questioned."

"Then you do not know the worst against me," said Radford, standing still and facing the priest. "It is not only that I was his adversary in that duel, but also that I challenged him on the strength of a mistake,—a ridiculous blunder which any child might have avoided. He was the *wrong man*,—do you understand? Not the man who made the remark at which I had taken offence,—it was only that I had not made sufficient inquiries. You know everything now. Is it not enough yet? Have you no other words for me at last?"

It seemed that Father Floryan had no words at all. With astonished eyes, and lips a little apart, he stood opposite to Radford and slowly folded his hands before him, while a shower of golden arrows, the parting salute of the setting sun, came slipping in between the ash-stems and clung in brilliant sheaves to the surface of his worn black *soutane*. The wonder on his face, and the silk handkerchief

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tied under his chin, combined to make him look like a rather grotesque old woman. Yet Radford felt no inclination to laugh.

Presently he saw that the priest's lips were moving.

"What are you saying?" he asked, lowering his own voice.

"I am saying, Thy Will be done," answered Father Floryan, just audibly. "I have often said it before."

This was the moment which remained fixed in Radford's memory.

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CHAPTER VII.

By his second or third visit Radford had learnt to disentangle and to classify the different members of the Milnovics family. Taken in a general way they could be defined only as a collection of failures, and in a general way, too, each was resigned to his lot; but just as each had accomplished this failure in his or her own particular way, so also did resignation take in each of them an individual form.

The hard-featured woman, whom Radford had rightly guessed to be a sister of Father Floryan's, had buried not only her husband, but also five children, and all this so long ago that even her best friends were apt to forget that Jadwiga Serpow had ever been anything but her brother's housekeeper. But Jadwiga Serpow herself did not forget, just as little as she had ever forgiven Fate for the wrongs it had done her. There were others among her best friends who maintained that the wrongs had been committed not by Fate, but by the defunct Father Jozef himself, who in his leisure

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hours had cultivated homœopathy, and who, according to the popular belief, had "cured" all his children "into their graves," and himself into the bargain. Madame Serpow herself believed in nothing but Fate. Its blows had not broken her, rather they had but hardened and stiffened an originally vigorous nature; but her belief in God's goodness, and consequently in that of man, was gone. She had become a sour and suspicious old woman, as honest as daylight—although she did not believe in honesty—but also as tough as leather.

Agniecka Dydicka, Stepan's eldest sister, was quite as much a failure in her way. As a very young girl she had, to the consternation of her family, insisted on marrying an exceedingly good-looking railway official whom she had spoken to half-a-dozen times, in place of the worthy young deacon for whom she had been destined. It had cost the *Popa* a sharp pang to see a daughter of his bestow her hand upon a secular personage, and when a few years later Agniecka had been thrown again upon his hands, a disappointed and abandoned woman, unaware even of her husband's whereabouts—for the railway official had made excellent use of his intimate acquaintance with time-tables—Father Floryan had never doubted that this was the direct punishment for the sin committed against custom if not against law. Ag-

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niecka's manner of looking at events was almost the direct opposite of that of her aunt. Morally she was not nearly as strong as Jadwiga Serpow, not nearly as well able to look events in the face, and being perfectly aware of this, the ingenious little woman had hit upon the device of not looking them in the face. Once admit to herself that her life was wrecked, and she knew that her strength must break down. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to shut her eyes tightly, and use all her ingenuity in persuading herself that there really was nothing seriously wrong anywhere. Her philosophy was that of the ostrich that buries its head in the sand. Thus, although it was eleven years now since her return home, she would not yet consider herself, or allow herself to be considered, as finally abandoned. It was true that her temper and that of Ladislas had not always perfectly agreed, and it was probably better that they should not meet for the present, but some day, no doubt, he would come to fetch her again; and meanwhile she did her best to feel convinced that, in spite of the somewhat discouraging appearances, the heart of the gay railway official had belonged to her all along. There was something good in every ill, she was wont to say—it all depended upon how one looked at things; and to such perfection had she developed her theory, that if only a saucer came

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to be smashed and her aunt Jadwiga was bitterly lamenting the loss, Agniecka was able to discover some hidden advantage lurking behind the accident,—such, for instance, as that the saucer should have broken at this particular juncture, rather than at some other, possibly more inconvenient moment. In this way she went through life with a veil carefully held between her and every sort of unpleasant truth; and although there came moments when the sham cheerfulness would break down, and hysterics take the upper hand, yet on the whole the system might be said to answer well, since it had saved her from despair.

Bogumil Meczek had invented no theory against misfortune, and perhaps for this reason had succumbed to it more completely. He was the same virtuous deacon whom Father Floryan had originally destined for Agniecka, and who in her default had married her younger sister Marcia, without any particular regret; for what the deacon wanted was neither exactly Agniecka nor exactly Marcia, but simply the wife who to a destined Ruthenian priest is indispensable. But Bogumil was never to become a priest; for while he was preparing to receive orders Marcia died in her first confinement, leaving him a widower of not yet twenty-two, cut off for ever from the hope of the priesthood, since it is only in very exceptional

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cases, and never before the age of forty years, that the Greek Church permits a widower to attain to this dignity. The double blow had been more than enough to crush out of Bogumil Meczek whatever spark of spirit he may once have possessed. He went down under it once and for ever, and since that time had made no effort to rise again. Ever since the collapse of his prospects he had gone on living, or rather vegetating, in the house of his father-in-law, whom he was supposed to assist in his character of deacon, although he never now could be his successor.

Of all the family failures, that of poor Jusia was doubtless the most free of regret. Jusia had not failed through her own or any one else's fault; she had begun life as a failure—a mental failure —and although strangers saw only that she was so silent that some people had taken her to be dumb, also that she was as greedy as a child, and had a strange habit of wandering about alone and falling asleep at all sorts of odd moments, yet every one in the village knew that the *Popa's* youngest daughter had never had all her wits about her—a circumstance generally attributed to the carriage accident which had happened to her mother shortly before the girl's birth.

As for Father Floryan himself, his own particular manner of resignation was certainly the sim-

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plest of any ever invented, consisting as it did in an unconditional and unquestioning submission to the decrees of Heaven—the sort of submission whose motto consists in the one word *Fiat*, but which in this case, although deeply religious, did not spring from religion alone, but to some extent also from that strange sense of fatalism so indigenous in the Slav mind, and with which the attitude of Jadwiga Serpow's mind was, unknown to herself, just as much coloured as that of either Agniecka's or Bogumil's. That "peace of God, which passeth all understanding," strikes root more easily in an oriental than in an occidental mind.

There remains but to speak of Stepan: he who having been the one success of the family had now come to swell the strange assortment of failures already gathered under the straw-thatched roof of the *plebanija*. The form which resignation would ultimately take with him was so far undetermined. Whether he would settle down into the hard cynicism of his aunt, or sink into the dull apathy of his brother-in-law, or whether there was any hope of his ever raising himself to the heights on which his father lived, no one, least of all Stepan himself, could yet know. The danger of bitterness—an egotistical and loveless bitterness—was that which lay nearest. Although barely twenty-six years old, he already had in him the makings of a pessimist

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—not so much as regards his fellow-creatures, of whom he had as yet had but little experience, but as regards life and the chances of life. That letter begun on the eve of the duel, and destined never to be finished, marked by far the most sanguine mood which he had yet experienced, as well as the most expansive. It had required the Inspector's visit and its brilliant results to loosen his tongue so far as this, even towards his father. A morbid reticence was Stepan's bane. Having lived through a joyless childhood, he had, on reaching manhood, found himself standing isolated in the midst of his relations. To them, indeed, he was all in all; upon him were concentrated all their hopes of a brighter future, just as upon him also had been spent all the meagre sums painfully saved both from cupboard and wardrobe. But through these very means he was in a certain degree estranged from his own people. They had sacrificed themselves to further his studies, yet exactly those studies it was which showed him everything in a new light —amongst other things, his own home and his own relations. He could no longer see with their eyes nor hear with their ears. Having once become aware of what he could do, and having once had a glimpse of the battle-field without, he knew that he could not be content to sit still as they were sitting.

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Yet there had intervened a period of doubt. Pulled one way by the inherent pessimism of his nature, which told him that a fight was useless, plucked at on the other by the consciousness of vigorous youth and perfect strength, it took some little time to let him come to the conclusion that he was indeed strong enough to attempt the struggle with Fate. It was with no boyish enthusiasm that he rushed into the battle, nor was he intoxicated with over-sanguine expectations. Deliberately, and with eyes wide open, did he take up the unequal fight, well knowing it to be unequal, clearly foreseeing his chances of defeat, and yet determined to take the risk The step was almost unavoidable; this alone could satisfy the substratum of fighting instinct which exists in every healthy man's nature. He could not have remained passive without at least having tried his strength against that of the giant, and satisfied himself by personal experience that this giant is not to be overcome.

Originally Stepan had been destined for the Church, or rather for the Cloister; for the *Popa* was ambitious for his son, and it is entirely from the ranks of the monastic clergy that the Greek Church selects her bishops. It had been the bitterest moment in Father Floryan's life when Stepan discovered to him that he had a leaning towards

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the army—bitterer even than had been Agniecka's defection from the deacon—but he had scarcely resisted. He could as little hope to shake a resolution of his son's as he would ever have dreamt of questioning the superiority of his intellect.

For five years all had gone well, and even the deacon began to have visions—very distant ones, it is true—of his brother-in-law with the green feathers, which mark an Austrian general, flaunting upon his hat. Then followed the duel and its results.

To Stepan the full recognition of the catastrophe brought at the first an access of outwardly repressed, but not the less savage, rage against Fate, and to some extent against Fate's instrument. It was almost as though the cruel goddess had played him this trick merely for her own entertainment. She had given him a little tether, had allowed him to amuse himself by the belief that he was approaching victory, and then with one jerk of the string, with one tap of her little finger, she had knocked over this would-be adversary, by way of teaching him a lesson for his impudence.

But almost before he was aware of feeling enraged there had come another thought, the thought of his father. From his earliest childhood he had loved him with a passionate devotion, with which yet was mingled a certain tender pity. In him he

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recognised a saint, although not of a pattern which he himself would ever have set up for imitation. It was for him that he meant to succeed in life, for the sake of shedding a brighter gleam over the evening of that long, cheerless day. He had counted on repaying every sacrifice a hundred-fold, on smoothing away those careworn wrinkles with joyful surprises. Those had been his dreams, and now he was a cripple.

Upon rage there followed an uneasy despair, which the vanquished man did his best to lock within himself, for fear of that pity which he read in the eyes of every man he met, since every man knew his story. It was from that pity that he had fled when he abruptly left Lohatyn, but in the person of Alfred Radford it had pursued him unto his retreat.

By the end of the first month Radford had given up all hope of being accepted as a sinner, and had taught himself to bear with what grace he could those coals of fire which the Milnovics family seemed bent on heaping upon his head. Since he could not do public penance in sackcloth and ashes, as he would have wished, and having been cured of lending things to Stepan, he attempted to relieve his mind by bringing sweetmeats for Jusia, and books for Agniecka, and music for the deacon, who

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at times was given to piping mournfully upon a flute, as well as to conciliating Madame Serpow's eminently housewifely mind by an occasional pot of English mustard or marmalade. Often after a long day spent in the saddle would he arrive at nightfall tired and dusty, laden with some fresh roll that had just come by the post, or with some new sort of tobacco for the Turkish *chibouk* which was the one luxury allowed himself by the *Popa*. He was no longer a stranger at Berenów, but a gladly welcomed friend. His individuality had helped him to this in the first place, but his position and his money had likewise assisted, here as everywhere. Not that either interest or servility were at work here. Probably not one of these people would have taken his money, or if so, only with a great effort; but neither could they entirely escape the pleasant sensation of awe which the mere thought of that money exercised upon them. It was not their fault, but the fault of human nature, if, unknown to themselves, they found it easier to forgive a rich man than it would have been to forgive one as poor as themselves. By degrees his visits came to be looked forward to as to a welcome break in the greyness of everyday life. His ringing voice and ready laughter—for in spite of himself he had learned to laugh again—brought new life into the silent house. When a week passed

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without the visitor, Father Floryan would mildly observe—though of course without complaining—that Lieutenant Radford seemed to have forgotten them. Even Jusia would watch for half an hour at a time at the gate, looking out with greedy eyes for the box of *bonbons*, without which she had learned to know that he never came; and even the small servant Marysia would burst radiantly into the room to announce that the *Pan Lieutenant's* horse was just crossing the bridge.

All this was good enough of its kind, Radford told himself, but it was not enough. It did well enough in the meantime, until he could find something real which he could do, something that would directly benefit Stepan himself. But what should this something be? So far he had no idea.

The first step must be to gain Stepan himself, for Stepan was not yet gained: on this point Radford had no illusions. He had indeed never with a word objected to his comrade's visits, but neither had he ever welcomed him in anything but the most conventional manner. Radford understood perfectly well that he had not given in, and he knew also that if he had not yet been forbidden the house, it was because the sight of the mild pleasure on the father's face, of the old eyes lighting up at the entrance of the visitor, was keeping tied the tongue of the son. From the first he had been careful to

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accentuate the very real feeling of reverence with which Father Floryan inspired him. Some instinct told him that this was the road to his comrade's heart.

Whether he had made any way or not he could scarcely say; almost it seemed to himself as though he were but standing still. Then quite unexpectedly there came a day which brought him new hope. It was a day which, looked back upon in later years, appeared like the beginning not of this hope alone, but of many other things as well.

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CHAPTER VIII.

It was on a Sunday towards the end of July, for Radford's Sunday afternoons belonged almost as a matter of course to Berenów. On this Sunday he had happened to get off rather earlier than usual, and on reaching the house he found it deserted even of Marysia, for none of the household had yet returned from afternoon service. The door, however, was as usual open, and Radford, who by this time knew his way at least as well as any of the hens who had the run of the kitchen, entered without hesitation. On the table in the sitting-room there stood pen and ink, and several sheets of paper were scattered about, covered with single letters and words written awkwardly, and yet apparently not by a child, for a childish caligraphy sins almost always through over-roundness, while these curious attempts were all angles and corners. With a pang at his heart, Radford took up one of the sheets and contemplated it. He knew well enough what they signified. Not many weeks ago he had unexpectedly come upon Milnovics busied with

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just such a sheet as this. On that occasion the other had risen quickly and stuffed the paper into a drawer.

"I am learning to write," he had said drily, in answer to the unspoken question, and had immediately turned to an indifferent subject.

"He is making some progress, at least," reflected Radford with a mournful smile: "these *k*'s are much more creditable already than those which I caught sight of the other day. I suppose it is not really too late yet to train his left hand, and in that case——"

And Radford fell into a hopeful reverie, in which Milnovics figured sometimes as a brilliantly paid secretary to some Minister of State, and sometimes as the Minister himself. Of late he had heard no word dropped as to the future, and yet, although Milnovics still wore his uniform, the moment was wellnigh reached at which he must of necessity tender his formal resignation. On the one occasion on which he had found courage to broach the subject he had not learnt much.

"Yes, my general health is now recovered," Milnovics had replied, in anything but a tone of encouragement, to a question of Radford's.

"And, I suppose," the other had pursued, "that you will soon be thinking of doing something now?"

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"I suppose so," had been the answer. "Yes, I shall certainly have to be thinking of doing—something."

Beyond this point they had not got on that occasion.

Radford awoke from his dreams to observe that a stream of brown-coated peasants was pouring down the sides of the wooded hillock which sloped towards the yard. That meant that the afternoon service had been held in the old, wooden church up there, as was the case on special occasions, instead of in the new, whitewashed, long-spired edifice below, which had been standing for barely two years. Except on these special occasions, the little church on the hillock was rarely visited; and, indeed, had it not been for the fact that the graveyard which surrounded it still had some space to spare, the wooden house of prayer would probably long since have been relegated to the category of lumber.

"I shall look for them up there," decided Radford.

He crossed the yard with far less astonishment than he had done at his first visit, for in two months he had got used to many things,—for instance, to seeing Marysia enter barefooted with the *samovar*, and to being asked to help himself to sugar out of a disused sardine-box,—but, nevertheless, he had

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not yet completely got rid of a certain sense of surprise. Had it really never struck anybody that the dunghills would be less offensive if properly concentrated? And it was the same with everything else. A loose plank or a crooked hinge appeared to disturb nobody, not even Stepan, who in every other point was incomparably more sensitive than his relations; and as for Father Floryan, he was capable of knocking his reverend shins day after day against a broken door-post, or stumbling for a month consecutively into a hole left by a missing brick in the pavement of the passage, before the necessity of having either that door-frame or that hole looked to obtruded itself upon his notice.

"It must be something in the blood," Radford said to himself for the fiftieth time, as he crossed the yard to-day.

There were various paths winding up the hillside, all trodden into existence only by the feet of the peasants, and all bordered with a tangle of wild raspberry bushes which formed the undergrowth of birches and limes. It was difficult to say where the graveyard exactly began, for from the moment that the incline became less steep, grassy humps of an oblong shape were to be caught sight of among the trees, growing more conspicuous towards the top, until, having gained the level, they

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stood as thick as green waves that, by some word of magic, have been arrested in their course. The iron cross which marked the resting-place of the *Popa's* wife stood like a landmark in the midst of this wilderness. The little humpbacked church, up to whose very door the green waves seemed to be breaking, was built entirely of wood, dark-brown with age and more than half-rotten. Its three round roofs gave to it something of the appearance, although none of the gaiety, of a Chinese pagoda. An open passage ran round the small building, and here it was that Radford found the Milnovics family assembled and engaged in so earnest a conversation that his approach was not immediately observed. Jusia alone was amissing in the group, having wandered off to eat raspberries upon the older graves, where she knew that they grew thickest,—and this, too, seemed to disturb nobody's mind.

Father Floryan still wore his surplice and stole. It was a black stole—and not far off there stood a mound that was brown, instead of green. A muscular individual, whose copper-coloured mane was beginning to be mottled with grey, and whom Radford knew by sight as being something between a sacristan and a church singer, occasionally also a grave-digger, was just now giving the finishing touches with his spade to the newly-turned earth.

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It was evident that a funeral had been the attraction here this afternoon.

"And did she name any date?" Radford heard Madame Serpow inquiring as he approached.

"No," replied Agniecka, speaking even more shrilly than usual; "she says only before the end of the summer."

"But we're in the middle of July now," said Madame Serpow, and at that moment she caught sight of Radford and very nearly looked pleased. In these two months, and in the teeth of her own theory, she had got almost convinced that this young man had, after all, no darker motive lurking in the background of his visits to Berenów. At moments she got so far as to admit that he must be an exception, although she never forgot to add that exceptions prove the rule.

"What is the news?" asked Radford, when the greetings were over. "To judge by your faces there certainly *is* news."

"Of course there is," broke out Agniecka, with an aggravation of her usual nervous laugh, "and most excellent news too!"

"If you call it an excellent thing to be taken by surprise in this way, with the church roof all in holes and the school at sixes and sevens," drily responded her aunt, "then no doubt we have every reason to rejoice."

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"But, dearest aunt, we are not taken by surprise; there is still half the summer before us, and even if there was not——"

"It would be all the better if Antonina Brunowska were to find both the school and the roof exactly as they are, it would save *us* from false pride and *her* from hollow hopes; that's what you meant to say, was it not?"

"But I haven't heard the news yet," interrupted Radford. "What is the matter with the school? And who is Antonina Brunowska?"

"Antonina Brunowska!" repeated several voices in a chorus of reproachful surprise. "You surely must know who Antonina Brunowska is?"

"I have heard the name before," said Radford, penitently. "Let me see—is that the name of the —what do you call her? the *Pani?* Is the news about her?"

"The news is that she is coming home before the end of the summer to take possession of the estate," said Agniecka. "I have just been told so by Halina Mertic, the housekeeper. She was attending afternoon service."

"Which means that our days of peace are at an end," interpolated Madame Serpow.

"The Lord will show us the right road," murmured Father Floryan, on whose face a mild be-

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wilderment was nevertheless discernible, while with unsteady fingers he loosened his stole.

"Surely she won't be so very hard to please," observed Radford, by way of encouragement to the evidently startled company. "Who knows whether she hasn't been painted blacker than she is."

Although he had not immediately recognised the name, Radford had on several occasions heard the absent owner of the estate, of which the village of Berenów formed a part, alluded to, and as often as he had entered the village he had caught sight of the big house, whose cream-coloured walls were visible at the end of a long, straight avenue of very old and mostly half-dead poplars. He knew that Antonina had been the only daughter of the late possessor, who had died about four years ago; and had incidently learnt that the education of the orphan heiress, who was not yet of age, was being completed in Lemberg, under the eyes of her maternal aunt. He had found it quite natural that the person of Antonina Brunowska should loom supernaturally large in the minds of all the inhabitants of Berenów, and more particularly of the Milnovics family, whose position, even though indirectly, was in many ways dependent upon her goodwill, or would be so the moment that she came of age; and yet it had only been with half an ear that he

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listened to the surmises occasionally interchanged as to whether the youthful *Pani* would prove as easy-going as her father had been, and to the discussion of reports which spoke of her as strong-minded and sometimes even as eccentric. A lurking dread of possible reforms had rung through all these arguments, but had as yet not become acute, seeing that the heiress was barely eighteen and was not expected to come home until she reached her majority. Hence the consternation spread by Halina Mertic's news. Two questions claimed immediate attention—the question of a new roof, and the question of a new schoolmaster.

"But if she is not of age she cannot take possession," remarked Radford; "and until she has done that she cannot surely prove very formidable."

"Not formal possession, but she can do what she likes with that old fool of a guardian. Evidently he can't manage her any longer, and they say she is a young woman with ideas of her own—bad ideas, I suppose," added Madame Serpow, grimly, "since they always seem to come more naturally than the good ones."

"Well, let's hope she won't be an ogress," laughed the visitor good-humouredly. "Do none of you know her?" he asked, turning to Ste-

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pan, who had as yet taken no part in the discussion.

"As a child we all used to know her by sight—scarcely more than that."

"An ugly, brown-faced brat she used to be then," observed Madame Serpow.

"And as wilful as a mule," added the deacon, with a sigh. "They wanted me to give her religious instruction, but after the day she threw the catechism at my head I gave it up."

"But about the school," mildly put in Father Floryan—"ought we not to be talking of the school?"

"The application ought to be sent in immediately," remarked Madame Serpow, "and, if possible, also the name of a candidate. It certainly would not do to be without a master when Antonina Brunowska comes."

"Have you no schoolmaster?" inquired Radford. "What has become of Pelski?"

He knew that this was the name of a small, consumptive individual of whom he had caught various glimpses in the course of his visits, but who had invariably fled at his approach.

"That is what has become of Pelski," said the *Popa*, pointing towards the newest of the graves. "He was ill for only a few days."

"That is to say, he has been ill for half his life,"

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corrected Stepan, "and has been dying so often that no one believed he was really dying this time until he was dead."

"He was waiting for the most appropriate moment, you see," supplemented Madame Serpow. "To die at any other time might not have put us to any especial inconvenience, but to leave us without a schoolmaster at this juncture is almost a stroke of genius. I always said that he was a spiteful little body," and she frowned revengefully at the mound of newly-turned earth.

"If Bogumil felt able to undertake the extra work," suggested Father Floryan, looking doubtfully at his son-in-law.

But the deacon only shook his head despondently. He knew himself to be utterly unable to manage more than the religious instruction which already fell to his share, and which alone taxed his energies almost to the point of collapse.

"Unless we have a candidate they will send us a stranger," sighed the old *Popa*.

"If only Ladislas were here," said Agniecka abruptly. "He is so clever that he can manage anything. I am sure he would do as a schoolmaster, at least provisionally; but I am afraid he will not be back in time,—at this season his duties are especially onerous."

She looked round as she spoke with a certain

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defiance in her eyes, and her relations avoided her gaze and were silent. They were all of them acquainted with Agniecka's way of talking of her husband as of one whose absence was merely accidental, and whose return might any day be looked for, and they had all learned to humour her on this point, although with every year that passed it became more difficult to give even a tacit assent to the amiable fiction.

It was Father Floryan who broke the painful pause.

"We can talk about the school later on," he said a little hastily. "Heaven will no doubt send us good counsel, but there is still the question of the roof. Andrei!" and he signalled to the ecclesiastical maid-of-all-work who was just shouldering his spade, "how long would it take us to put on the new roof? The shingles are lying ready, you know."

As a matter of fact those shingles had been ready for a rather considerable time. Ever since Stepan had been a boy he could remember the piles of thin boards lying packed in one corner of the passage—not always the same boards, it is true, since from time to time they were found to be rotten and had been renewed, for the idea of re-covering the church roof had ever and anon been indistinctly entertained without having, in Stepan's

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memory at least, as yet reached fulfilment. Of course it would have to be re-covered some day, but meanwhile the church funds were so low and Andrèi was so clever at patching up the holes, and so ingenious in adapting bits of board for the requirements of the moment, that a series of indefinite postponements was the natural result. Being called upon now to give his opinion on the subject, Andrei expressed his belief that, as far as he could see, there was nothing particularly wrong with the roof, and that the employment of the shingles would be a piece of useless extravagance—for Andrei was nothing if he was not economical.

"It would not do to begin and not to be finished," remarked the *Popa*, doubtfully.

"Better leave things as they are," was the deacon's comment.

"You're always wanting to leave things as they are, Bogumil Meczek," bitterly observed Madame Serpow; "we all know that. But if you had been in my place last Pentecost Monday, and had had your best bonnet spoiled by the drippings from the roof, maybe you'd have changed your mind by this time."

"There is no doubt that a big drop did fall upon the book of Gospels," said Father Floryan, looking half-deprecatingly at Andrei.

"I know the hole which your Reverence

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means," serenely replied Andrei, "and I have already put aside the lid of the case in which the last altar-wine came; it will cover it beautifully. Really, I can see no reason for using up the new shingles."

When the discussion had lasted for several minutes longer, Andrei, in a slightly aggrieved frame of mind, proposed to take the *Popa* up to the top of the bell-tower beside them, where he would have a better view of the roof, and could convince himself of its being in a fit condition to bear the scrutiny even of Antonina Brunowska. This bell-tower, in which no bell had hung for two years, it having been transferred to the newly-built house of prayer below, stood at about a dozen paces from the church, and could be reached only by stumbling up and down half-a-dozen graves. The company began to move in that direction; they were alone now in the graveyard, since the last of the church-goers had dispersed. The building was nothing but a square, squat, wooden shell, with a platform half-way up, and four small windows at the top. A heap of disused ropes, the wreck of an altar-railing, and various other fragments of ecclesiastical rubbish, lay in the corners of the dark space below. Of the wooden steps that led to the platform above, three were awanting.

"We will go up without you, Father," said

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Stepan, standing still at the foot of the ladder. "It does not look very safe. You had better stay outside with Aunt Jadwiga and Agniecka, and we will bring the report."

But Father Floryan wanted more than a report. The event of the day had produced in him something that almost resembled excitement, and he wished to judge of the roof with his own eyes.

The ascent was safely accomplished; but it was during the descent, which took place some ten minutes later—the roof having been condemned in the face of Andrei's almost tearful protestations—that there occurred the accident destined to revive Alfred Radford's hopes of ultimate success in the task which he had set himself.

Radford and the deacon had already reached the ground, when Father Floryan, who was following, mistaking a broken step for a whole one in the semi-darkness, suddenly lost his footing and stumbled violently forward. Milnovics, who was above him, made an instinctive but ineffectual movement with his left arm. A serious accident seemed unavoidable, when Radford, hearing Milnovics's exclamation, turned quickly round, and pushing aside the bewildered deacon, sprang on to the lowest step, just in time to break the weight of the fall against his outstretched right arm.

Several moments passed before Andrei had

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swung himself down from above to come to his assistance in lifting the *Popa* to the ground. Milnovics, looking rather white, followed immediately.

"Is he hurt?" he asked in a voice which, without being excited, yet betrayed an inexpressible terror.

"I think not," said Radford, against whose arm Father Floryan was still leaning, breathing a little faster than usual. "I think he is only faint from the fright."

In a few minutes the *Popa* was sufficiently recovered to be able to walk homewards, and by that time, too, the momentary flurry which had pervaded the company had begun to die away. Stepan alone remained more silent than usual, and when the moment for leave-taking came he had disappeared from the room. There was nothing remarkable about this, seeing that good-byes and greetings were things which he always liked to avoid. Without dwelling on the matter, Radford stepped out of the house, and, to his astonishment, found Stepan waiting for him beside the gate.

"Good night, Milnovics," he said, putting out his hand.

"Good night," said Milnovics, and added after a second's pause, "Thank you for what you did today, Alfred."

He turned as he spoke, and walked rapidly back

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to the house, while Radford looked after him in the dark, wondering whether he ought not to follow. At the sound of that last word he had felt the sudden flush upon his face. The importance of the moment was quite clear to him. If that one word was not exactly a surrender, yet to one who knew Stepan, it undoubtedly signified the first step towards one.

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CHAPTER IX.

The friendship of which the foundation had been laid on that Sunday afternoon very nearly failed to come into existence after all. Radford's next visit to Berenów brought with it a danger which, for one moment, appeared about to stifle the new-born plant, even in the seed.

It so happened that three weeks passed before this next visit took place, for the manœuvres were at their height, and the regiment had been at work at some distance from Lohatyn. On the very day of return Radford mounted his chestnut and started for Berenów, impatient to test the reality of his hopes with regard to Stepan, and impatient also to lay before him the contents of a letter which he carried in his pocket.

The day was sultry, and the road covered with a thick layer of dust, as fine and almost as white as flour, rising in a cloud at every footfall of the horse, and hovering for long in the still air before again sinking earthwards. By the time Berenów was reached the chestnut was no longer a chest-

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nut, but a doubtful looking grey, while Radford himself, with his powdered hair, dingy uniform, and eyes half blinded with dust, bore far more resemblance to a miller out on a spree than to a lancer lieutenant..

The appearance of the village took him by surprise. Berenów was far from presenting its usual peacefully sleepy aspect. Everybody seemed to be moving and busy; several houses were being white-washed, door-steps which had probably not been scrubbed for a year were being operated upon, while the festive green boughs on the roofs recalled to Radford's mind that afternoon in May when he had made his first entrance here. The branches which had seemed to welcome him then had long since grown brown and rustling, but were only now being plucked from their places and flung down on the road to make room for their successors. He supposed this must be the eve of some high festival, although he could not remember which, not having the Greek calendar at his finger ends.

At the *plebanija* he found the turmoil at its highest. Through the wide open gate a cart laden high with birch branches was just creaking into the yard, while Andrei with more than usually tangled locks, and a look of semi-distraction on his face, was racing for the hillock, from whose top the

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sound of vigorous hammering echoed through the hot air. A ladder stood against the house, and—most astonishing of all—the deacon was actually exerting himself so far as to hand up the boughs to one of the farm-servants who sat upon the roof. Agniecka, with an apron over her dress, could be seen darting backwards and forwards across the passage, sometimes with a broom in her hands, and sometimes with a hammer or a piece of string, while in the sitting-room, where all the furniture was pushed into one corner, and two scrubbing-brushes were at work, Madame Serpow was doing something with a bundle of sticks and a heap of cotton handkerchiefs, and the *Popa*, his white hair escaping from under his displaced head-covering, moved from corner to corner with a duster in his hand, anxiously peering about for possible spider-webs.

So great was the general excitement that Radford's entrance was scarcely noticed.

"Yes, it is a great occasion," said Father Floryan absently, in answer to the simultaneous greeting and question. "Agniecka, my love, I see one more up there, but perhaps I had better not get upon a chair, or perhaps the *Pan Lieutenant* will be so kind as to remove it."

"But what is the occasion?" asked Radford, having complied with the *Popa's* wish. "I see nothing but green branches everywhere, and——"

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"We have too few of them on the roof, have we not?" remarked Agniecka, darting into the room. "I told you that we should need another cart-load, Aunt Jadwiga. Shall I give the order?"

Madame Serpow shrugged her bony shoulders.

"Give the order if you like, but what difference a few branches more or less will make to Antonina Brunowska is more than I can say. Have you got those nails I sent you for?"

"So it is Antonina Brunowska who is the cause of all this? I thought she was not expected until——"

"Would you mind holding this stuff while I cut it in two?" interrupted Madame Serpow. "Agniecka has run away just because I wanted her."

"But about Antonina Brunowska?"

It took several more minutes and several more questions before anybody's attention was sufficiently arrested to supply a coherent explanation. Radford then learned that for some reason, or apparently for no particular reason, the *Pani* had suddenly decided upon hurrying the date of her arrival, and was expected to reach her home on the very next day, when tradition and custom made it necessary that the village should wear its most brilliant holiday aspect.

"And the result is, as you see, that even Bogu-

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mil has recognised that this is not a moment for leaving things as they are," said Madame Serpow with a jerk of her head, indicating the window. "I believe he has actually handed up a dozen branches already."

"And Stepan, where is he?"

"At the schoolhouse. They are just as mad there as we are here. If Antonina Brunowska comes up to her reputation she will probably put her nose into every corner the very moment that she steps out of the carriage. Not that it matters much; everything happens as it is ordered, and even Antonina Brunowska is only another instrument. Upon my word, Jusia is the only sensible one among us. She has gone to sleep in the corner of the kitchen. More nails, Agniecka," she called through the open door. "The last were too small."

Radford left the house immediately, for it was only to talk to Stepan that he had come to-day.

The school-house, distinguishable from the other houses only by the bell which hung between two tall posts straight in front of the door, lay at about the centre of the village. Several persons were busy within, but on first entering it appeared to Radford that Milnovics was not one of them. Here, too, the boards were still shining with wet; and the benches which had been piled at the end

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of the long, low room were only now being replaced in their proper position by two peasant lads, under the direction of a tall, spare man in a linen coat and grey trousers, who stood with his back towards the door. A big, highly-coloured young person stood upon a chair, diligently sticking purple asters into the frame of a large coloured lithograph of the Emperor Francis Joseph, while a small, pale-faced young person was holding the basket of flowers.

"Can any one tell me where Lieutenant Milnovics is?" asked Radford, somewhat hoarsely, for the dust of the road was still in his throat.

The man in the linen coat turned round, and, to his astonishment, Radford recognised his comrade.

"Milnovics—Stepan! What on earth does this mean?"

"It means only that there is no more Lieutenant Milnovics," replied the other, colouring a little under Radford's astonished gaze. "You surely knew that I could not wear the uniform for ever."

"Yes, but until you had resigned."

"I have already resigned."

"Before the end of your leave?"

"Yes, before the end of my leave. It was advisable for many reasons," he added, with a glance

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towards the two young women at the other side of the room.

Radford understood that this was not the moment for explanations, more particularly as he was just then requested to make way for a bench that was to be placed at that particular spot. It seemed as though he were in the way everywhere to-day —in the way, that is, of Antonina Brunowska and of her vassals. In somewhat moody silence he stood by, watching Milnovics as he directed the movements of the two lads and simultaneously answered the questions of the two young women, who, having done for the Emperor's portrait, wanted to know whether the blackboard was likewise to be decorated, and in what fashion, also what was to be done about the big ink-stain in the corner of the room, and whether brown paper or white paper was to be used for replacing the window-pane which Anna Bellek had broken yesterday during evening class. This and a great many other things they wanted to know; for scarcely had the small young woman put a question than the big young woman did her best to think of something to ask, being evidently determined not to leave all the conversation with the former lieutenant to her pale-faced companion. He did not seem to be looked upon with disfavour by either of the young school-mistresses, and yet, Radford

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told himself as he stood by, his comrade had undoubtedly appeared to greater advantage in the Lancer uniform than in his present dress. Stepan had never been called a handsome man, for that his face was too narrow, his lips too thin, and, above all, his expression too unyouthful; but with his finely cut nose and coal-black eyes set somewhat deep under slightly protruding brows, he had been a striking figure wherever he showed himself. For the first time to-day Radford had the opportunity of judging of the truth of the somewhat brutal proverb which says that it is the clothes that make the man. This Milnovics of to-day was not quite the same Milnovics that he had known. The badly-made linen coat did its best to disguise the lithe and well-knit figure, while its uncertain colour was far from harmonising with the intensely black hair and eyes in the way that the blue *uhlanka* with the red facings had done. The sight helped to increase Radford's moodiness. To see his comrade standing thus palpably one step lower in the world meant a new and sharper pang of self-reproach.

"You seem very busy," he observed at last; and then as a recollection visited him, "Have you got no schoolmaster yet?"

"Yes, we have got a schoolmaster," replied Milnovics; and, with another glance across the room, added in a lower tone, "I will tell you about

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that afterwards. In five minutes I shall be done with this."

Owing to the many doubts which the two young school-dames still wished to have settled, the five minutes became ten; and it was with his stock of patience wellnigh exhausted that Radford at length stepped out of the school-house by the side of Milnovics.

He lost no time in saying what he had come to say. A letter of his mother's had told him that there was a chance of securing for his comrade a position in one of the best-known Vienna banks. The work was almost purely nominal, the position being chiefly honorary, and the salary quite acceptable.

Milnovics listened in silence until Radford had finished his explanations, and then said, without any of the bitterness with which he had declined the first offer of help, but with an evidently fixed determination—

"No, thank you, Alfred; that is not the sort of work I could ever undertake."

"But the work is really nothing; you will only have to control the others. Of course you would have to go through a course of book-keeping, but for a man with your brains that will be child's play. What they want is a safe man, that is all."

"I should not be a safe man, since I cannot

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undertake to control others without having completely mastered the work which they are expected to do, and this work I should certainly never master. I have always detested everything in which arithmetic played a part. No, I certainly cannot undertake the responsibility."

"But surely it is better than doing nothing at all."

"I am not doing nothing at all. I was just about to tell you that I had got an appointment."

"An appointment?" questioned Alfred in astonishment, and just then Milnovics stood still and turned round in answer to a call that resounded from somewhere down the street. It was the big schoolmistress who could be seen flying along between the houses, and who arrived breathless with one more final question which had occurred to her and which she now panted out amid vivid blushes. At what hour were the schoolgirls to be marshalled next morning? and was she to lead the way with her pupils, or did Pan Milnovics intend to take the precedence with the boys?

Milnovics briefly and somewhat impatiently settled the question, and then turned to resume his way. For a few seconds Radford walked silently beside him. He had not understood every word of what had been said, but he knew enough Polish by this time to guess the purport of the remarks

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made. With awakened suspicion he glanced at his companion.

"Stepan," he said in an altered tone, "why does she ask you this question about the boys? Why does she not go to the schoolmaster? You told me that you had a schoolmaster; you told me also that you had found employment,—you surely don't mean to say——"

"Yes, I do mean to say it," replied Stepan, steadily, and, acting upon the same impulse, the two men stood still again and faced each other in the middle of the village street.

The mingled incredulity and horror on Alfred's face was printed so broadly that Stepan only just stopped short of laughing.

"What are you looking so desperate about?" he asked, with a faint smile. "There have to be schoolmasters in the world, so why should I not be one of them?"

Alfred had recovered his speech. "Great heavens, Stepan, are you really serious? Surely it is impossible."

"I assure you that it is not impossible. No doubt a one-armed schoolmaster sounds an absurdity, but I have been working very hard lately, and I can really write quite decently by this time, decently enough, that is to say, for chalking up letters on a board, though it never would become

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decent enough to do the accounts in your Vienna bank."

"That is not what I mean,—you know it isn't. A village schoolmaster! You, with your abilities, —why, even the Colonel admitted that you had the head of a tactician on your shoulders,—*you* to bury yourself in this hole, in order to teach young savages their A B C,—Stepan, it cannot be true!"

"Do not excite yourself," said Stepan, somewhat coldly. "Very likely I shall not be at the A B C for long. The strong-minded Antonina Brunowska will most likely not be contented with a left-handed schoolmaster, and will find ways and means for having me removed. She has friends enough at headquarters."

"And do you pretend to say that you like the work?"

"I do not pretend anything of the sort, but I like still less to look on at my father reducing his ration of tobacco, and Agniecka spreading the butter thinner upon her bread, day by day. I am another mouth to feed, you know. Don't look at me like that, I beg of you; you should be congratulating me, instead of condoling. I consider myself in luck. If this had not been my father's parish I could never have got the place."

"What is the salary of a schoolmaster here?"

"It comes to about twenty-two florins a-

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month," replied Stepan, carefully avoiding Alfred's eyes as he spoke. "It was because of this chance that I sent in my resignation, without waiting for the end of my leave. I lose something in pay, but the opening might have been filled up if I had waited, so I gain more in the end."

"Less than half of a lieutenant's pay," groaned Alfred to himself.

"I wish you had not acted in such a hurry," he remarked aloud. "If at least you had waited until I was back."

"The thing had to be done in a hurry. My father has had some heavy expenses lately, that is to say, what *we* call heavy," added Stepan, with a rather bitter laugh. "Several of the vestments were found to be defective, and had to be replaced before the arrival of Antonina Brunowska. The church-moneys did not suffice, and, rather than be discredited in the eyes of the new *Pani*, my father had recourse to private means. But it is no use wasting words over it," he abruptly broke off, as though provoked with himself for having said so much as this. "The long and the short of it is that, in face of all this, I did not consider myself justified in letting this chance go by."

"Always Antonina Brunowska," ground out Radford between his teeth. He had not seen her yet, and he felt already as though he hated her.

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Again he walked on in silence, not because he had nothing to say, but because he was trying to collect his thoughts, in face of this unlooked for contingency. He was grievously distressed, and yet at the same time he was almost pleasantly moved by something about Stepan's manner, something which used not to be there. What he had said was not much, but it came infinitely nearer to being a confidence than anything he had hitherto said. Alfred's instinct told him that this was the fruit of that which had happened at their last meeting. Some of the obdurate hardness had gone from both glance and tone, and though he might not yet be accepted as a friend, it was clear that he was no longer received as an enemy. His right to speak would now not be denied, and he would make use of his right; he would see whether by his words he could not yet avert this evil that was threatening.

"Stepan," he began earnestly, but scarcely had he said the one word than to his astonishment he became aware that the gate of the *plebanija* was already reached, and all privacy at an end for the present.

It was in deep perturbation of spirit that he followed Stepan into the house, where every one was still running about breathless and flushed, occupied principally, it would seem, in getting into

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one another's way. Father Floryan, tired out with the unusual exertion, was sitting apart, with a hand on either knee, and his head sinking somewhat forward. The furniture was still in the corner of the room, and the flags which were to be hung from the church tower, and which consisted of scarlet and orange cotton handkerchiefs nailed on to wooden poles, were lying scattered over the floor. A discussion was just now going on as to the advisability of despatching a cart to the neighbouring village for a certain Jew who possessed a fiddle, in order to heighten the effect of the village band, which consisted of two flutes and one concertina. Madame Serpow was of opinion that the fiddle would make no difference to Antonina Brunowska, but Agniecka was on fire with the idea.

"It will make just *the* difference," she fervently declared. "They had a fiddle at Bublice when the proprietor came home, and surely we are not going to be outdone by *them!* Ah, there is Stepan,—am I not right, Stepan? Listen!"

Thus appealed to, Milnovics joined the group at the further end of the room. Radford, catching sight of an unexpected opportunity, stepped quickly up to the corner where the old *Popa* was sitting alone, taking no part in the discussion.

"Father Floryan," he said hurriedly, somewhat lowering his voice, "Stepan has just told me that

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he has been appointed schoolmaster. It is impossible that he should continue in so mean a position, but I understand that the resolution was taken in a hurry, because of some—of some financial embarrassments, which suddenly arose. If I had been here I am sure it would not have happened, and even now perhaps something can still be done. I have only fifty florins by me, but if they are of any use for the moment—you cannot refuse to accept them as a favour, as a *favour* to *me*—remember that I have a right,—no, that it is my duty to do something for Stepan."

Father Floryan had raised his head from his breast and was listening in bewilderment. He did not immediately understand what this was about, but, having grasped it, the tears rose irresistibly to his eyes. He smiled unsteadily at Radford, while at the same time shaking his head and making a movement with his right hand as though to push aside the banknote which the other had furtively snatched out of his purse, as though he were afraid of being seen from the other end of the room. It had been towards the other end of the room, too, that the old *Popa* had begun by throwing an instinctive glance of alarm the moment that Radford's meaning became clear to him.

"You are good, but it would not do,—it would not do," he murmured, while his eye hung wistfully

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upon the crisp paper which, for those he loved, meant such a lifting of the load of care.

"It is not the same as though you were taking it from anyone else," urged Radford in the same guilty whisper.

"It would not do," repeated Father Floryan, but he said it more faintly already.

"Why would it not do? Have you got the right to refuse me an opportunity of atonement? It is a question of conscience; are you not a priest before anything else?"

Father Floryan looked into Radford's face, and slowly and hesitatingly put out his hand. The face had convinced him far more than the words. A gift that is so simply offered should be as simply taken. But the unsteady white fingers had not yet touched the paper when they were abruptly withdrawn, for, glancing upwards, the *Popa* had met the stern eyes of his son, looking at him over Radford's shoulder.

Radford turned round, and seeing his comrade beside him, instinctively attempted to stuff the banknote back into his purse.

"Don't take the trouble," said Milnovics, looking from Radford's face to that of his father, and speaking in a tone of forcibly suppressed rage. "I see what you have been doing; you have been offering money to my father,—and you, father,

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would have taken it if I had not been there. Is it not true?"

The *Popa* sunk his head in guilty silence.

"It would only have been a loan," said Radford quickly.

"No, it would not have been a loan," remarked Milnovics with a certain malicious emphasis. "We have no means and no prospect of ever repaying a loan, therefore it would have been a gift. Do you understand me, father? It is a gift which you were about to take from Lieutenant Radford. For Heaven's sake let us call things by their names. I have no right to forbid you the acceptance of gifts, but listen to this, father: for you to take money from him," and his glowing eyes just passed over Radford, "will mean a break for ever between him and me. Think of it well, father,—and now do what you like about the money."

He turned his back and began to recross the room, but had not reached the middle of the floor when Andrei, with his arms wildly waving and his eyes rolling in his head, dashed in through the open door and attempted to speak, but either from want of breath or from pure excitement succeeded only in gasping.

"The fiddle,—we must certainly have the fiddle!" Agniecka was insisting in her highest head-notes. "And more branches, more flags, more

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everything; the reception must be talked of ten years hence,—we must——"

Here she broke off at sight of Andrei, and was about to frame an alarmed question, when close upon his heels there appeared in the doorway the figure of a slight, dark-haired girl, dressed in a grey travelling-dress which was obviously town-made, and with a small grey hat upon her head. She stood still and looked about her, evidently in some astonishment; then, as her eyes fell upon the *Popa*, who had risen in his corner, she went quickly towards him and put out her hand.

"You are Father Floryan, are you not?" she asked, beginning to smile. "Do you not remember me? I am Antonina Brunowska."

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CHAPTER X.

It took several minutes to allay the first feeling of consternation, and it would certainly have taken much more but for Antonina Brunowska herself, who did not seem to see anything in the least embarrassing in the situation. Perceiving that Father Floryan was still too much paralysed with astonishment to put out his hand, she settled the matter by taking hold of it with both of hers and pressing it warmly, after which, without waiting for a reply to her question, she looked round her once more.

"I have come at an inconvenient moment, have I not? You seem to be having a big cleaning; but never mind,—I hate ceremony, and I shall find something to sit down upon, never fear!" and before any one had recovered enough presence of mind to intervene, Antonina had taken down the topmost chair from the pile beside her, and was just ensconcing herself upon it when her quick eye was caught by the heap of gaudy flags in the middle of the floor.

"Flags? What are these for? I have never

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heard of flags at a cleaning. And you have green branches on the roof, too,—surely you have not been——"

She looked from one face to the other with a dawning suspicion. No one replied—in fact no one had yet spoken since she entered the room,—but the silence in itself was answer enough.

Her eyes began to dance, and after a short, fruitless struggle, she burst into a clear laugh that was like the laugh of a high-spirited child.

"Oh, so that is it! Now at last I understand, and the green branches on the roof, they also were for me. I have come upon you in the middle of the preparations. Please don't be vexed—but I cannot help laughing—I really cannot; it is like a scene in a theatre; now I understand why you have all got such long faces and such round eyes. Oh, whoever would have thought of this?"

"Your arrival was announced for to-morrow," remarked Madame Serpow, in her most grating tone of voice.

"Of course it was, but I found it too long to wait till to-morrow; the last day of waiting is always by far the worst, do you not find so too? But, after all," said Antonina, suddenly recovering her gravity, "this is no misfortune; all those flags and branches and whatever else you may have planned, would not have pleased me half so much as this

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simple and—and homely reception. I have no taste for pageantry, all that belongs to the old *régime*, and that is just what we must sweep aside, —that and a great deal more," and with her neatly gloved hand she made a gesture as though she were brushing aside a fly.

"The old what?" ventured Father Floryan, finding his voice at last.

"The old *régime*. It is a French word, you know. I shall explain it to you some day when we have time. Dear Father Floryan, you don't feel ill, do you? You look so terribly white. I hope I haven't frightened you. Perhaps I ought to have sent a message, but the journey had not tired me a bit, and I really could not wait longer to see my field of work,—I have been dreaming of it for so long,—for I mean to do work, real work, and I will need you to help me. Father Floryan, you will help me, will you not? And in the meantime I may have a cup of tea, mayn't I?" she added in the same breath, looking inquiringly from Madame Serpow to Agniecka. "I am not at all tired, but I am perishing with thirst. It is my own fault for running away from the house before the *samovar* was hot."

Agniecka flew from the room in search of Marysia. The mere mention of the *samovar* had raised every one's spirits. Over the very wreck

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of to-morrow's prospects, over the hecatomb of useless banners and of branches that had been cut in vain, the chief emblem of Russian hospitality still shone out triumphant, like a star of salvation, spreading warmth and comfort from out of its shining brass breast. With a steaming *samovar* on the table it would become almost possible to regard the reception of Antonina Brunowska as not being a complete failure.

"She does not seem so very alarming, after all," reflected Radford, in the depths of the corner to which he had retreated.

From where he stood he could only occasionally catch a glimpse of her features seen *en profile*. Antonina Brunowska was a brunette of medium height, whose hair appeared to be black, except when a ray of sunshine, falling on it, revealed it to be of the deepest, richest shade of brown. Black eyebrows that were almost too strongly marked stamped her physiognomy with a look of energy and determination, but it was the eyes themselves that struck attention at the first glance,—dark, quick eyes, that were as full of lights as of shadows, and which, at moments, had something untamed and well-nigh fierce in their expression, while at other moments they looked like the eyes of a child. And not the eyes alone spoke of the child in her; for, not only did she give the impression of not

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having quite done growing, but even the faultless town-made dress could not disguise a certain juvenile angularity of limbs, as well as a certain want of finish—or maybe it was innate abruptness—about her movements. Obviously she was at an intermediate stage of both physical and mental development. The rawness of early youth betrayed itself in her laugh and even in her voice, but none of all this offended, and all of it pleased, and, to a certain degree, astonished. Her complexion, though somewhat dark, harmonised perfectly with the deep, shadowy hair. If she was not beautiful yet, it was only because Nature had still to put the finishing touches to her work. Everything about her, from the dark eyes that were never still, to the glowing lips which, despite their imperious curve, seemed forever ready to break into eager speech, breathed the very essence of a strong, youthful vitality. Her very smile overflowed with the joy of living. In the low, dingy sitting-room of the *plebanija*, where, as a rule, little was spoken, and that little not of an exhilarating nature, her coming had completely upset the mental atmosphere, much as though a strong, fresh breeze, entering through the open door, had dispersed all hanging clouds.

"Do we also belong to the things that are to be swept aside?" inquired Stepan suddenly. He had hitherto watched in perfectly impassive si-

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lence what was going on at the other side of the room.

Antonina turned quickly towards him.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because it struck me that we also are of the old *régime*; certainly we are of no new one."

She looked at him attentively instead of replying.

"Surely I ought to remember you; are you not the son? Let me see, what was he called? Cyprian? Christian?"

"Stepan," said the old *Popa* quickly.

"Ah, yes; now I remember your face quite well. Did not you recognise me too?"

"No, I did not recognise you," replied Stepan, steadily returning her gaze.

"Have I changed so very much?" she asked, in evident astonishment.

"You have changed very much."

She was still looking at him with a puzzled frown upon her face.

"I suppose I must be making a mistake, but I fancied, yes, I certainly believed, that you were in the army?"

Father Floryan glanced in instinctive alarm towards the second visitor; Madame Serpow smiled bitterly at the wet scrubbing-brush which,

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in the *sauve qui peut* of the charwomen, happened to have been cast down at her feet, and Stepan himself said nothing at all. It was Radford's voice that broke the painful pause.

"It is quite true that Stepan was in the army," he said, clearing his throat of the obdurate dust, "but he has been forced to leave it."

Radford in his corner was standing almost straight behind Antonina's chair. At the sound of this new and unpleasantly hoarse voice she turned her head in some astonishment, for she had not yet perceived him. What she saw now was a big and, as it struck her, somewhat clumsy-looking man, whose blue uniform-coat and yellow hair were scarcely to be recognised as either blue or yellow, because of the thick powdering of dust which clung to them and hung on his very moustache and eyelashes. Her eyes passed over him indifferently.

"This is a stranger, is it not, Father Floryan? Surely he does not belong to Berenów?"

"This is Lieutenant Radford, my comrade," said Stepan. "I ought to have introduced him earlier."

Antonina bowed and turned away again. Evidently she had no interest to spare just then for people who did not belong to Berenów—that is, to her future field of work.

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"You have been forced to leave the army?" she said, looking inquiringly at Stepan; and at that moment Marysia entered, bearing the *samovar* in triumph.

It became necessary to pull forward the table and to take some more chairs from the pile. Stepan lifted down two chairs with his left hand, and Antonina watched him as he did so. The *samovar* was in danger of falling; he righted it barely in time, also with his left hand, and at the same moment, looking up, found her eyes fixed upon him in astonished inquiry.

"I am not able to use my right arm," he said briefly.

"And that is why you are no longer a soldier?" she asked more softly, with eyes full of interest and of pity.

"Yes, that is why."

"But how could such a thing happen?"

"It was in consequence of a duel," said Stepan hurriedly, and then immediately added in a louder tone, "Since you say that you remember my face you have probably not forgotten my sister's either?"

"In consequence of a duel?" repeated Antonina, with an almost vindictive accent, and flushing vividly, as she was apt to do when moved. "Nothing like a duel for injustice and cruelty.

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That also is of the old *régime;* that also will have to go."

"Did you say that you had recognised my sister?" asked Stepan, unmoved.

Antonina began again to look about her.

"Let me see. Yes; I think I can recognise everybody here, if you only give me time. That," and she looked at Madame Serpow, "is not your sister, but your aunt, and I used to be terribly frightened of sitting opposite to her in church;" and she smiled into the old lady's unresponding face. "I was positively afraid of lifting my eyes from my book, for fear of meeting a reproving glance."

"You didn't look particularly afraid, anyhow," muttered Madame Serpow under her breath.

"And that is your elder sister; I remember her too—the married sister—what is her name? Agniecka? She used to be a little stouter than she is now; I remember her quite well, but somehow I don't seem to remember her husband."

"My husband is travelling at present," put in Agniecka, smiling radiantly.

"Ah, really? And your other sister is poor Jusia." Her face grew grave for a moment. "You see I even remember her name. I used to be afraid of her too, but now I am only sorry—very sorry. And, let me see, who is there still?" She

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glanced again at Radford, and again passed him over with a movement which said quite plainly, "You do not count." Then her eyes fell on Bogumil.

"Ah, the Deacon. Of course I remember the Deacon, and most certainly the Deacon remembers me. It was at your head, was it not, that I threw the catechism? You can't imagine how I was lectured for it! But, really, it was hard to be expected to learn one's catechism on Christmas Eve!"

She was laughing again from the bottom of her heart, and her laugh was infectious. Even Madame Serpow relaxed a little at sight of the Deacon's face, who, from the safe retreat of the window embrasure, was throwing mistrustful glances towards the speaker, almost as though, in spite of the fashionable length of her skirts, he suspected her of being capable of repeating that memorable operation on Christmas Eve.

Under cover of the general hilarity, Radford slipped out of the room. He felt that he was not wanted here to-day, that his presence stood in the way of these mutual reminiscences that were being exchanged, and in which he had no part. Another feeling, too—an uneasy feeling of guiltiness—made him glad to leave that room, for might not Antonina return to the subject of Stepan's disabled arm? The part he had played at its first mention

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had seemed to himself both pitiable and absurd; he would not risk having to go through it once more.

"She must have changed a good deal since she left the place," he mused on his homeward ride. "Who called her an ugly, brown-faced brat? She is certainly not ugly now; a little lanky, perhaps, but with those eyes she may improve into almost anything. Her shoulders want filling out; but her eyes—no, I don't think her eyes want anything done to them, though, to be sure, I scarcely saw them properly."

"After all, it is just as well she took us by surprise," said Agniecka that evening, when the day's events were being reviewed. "Since she really hates pageantry and fuss, all our flags and our fiddles would only have put her in a bad humour from the first, while this way she was simply delightful."

"If things had been left as they were," sighed the Deacon, "then there would have been no fuss, and all this trouble would have been saved." And he sadly shook his head at recollection of the useless hour spent upon the ladder, and of the many branches handed up in vain.

"This accident was ordered from above," said Father Floryan, with a touch of admonition.

Madame Serpow said nothing at all, but drew

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in her lips till they were scarcely visible. In her heart of hearts she was convinced that the descent upon them had been no accident, but a deep-laid plan of the *Pani's*, made with the express intention of putting everybody to extreme inconvenience.

After all, Agniecka had her wish; for although neither procession nor triumphal arches ever came off, yet the coming home of Antonina Brunowska, and the circumstances attending it, were talked of in the country-side for even more than ten years.

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CHAPTER XI.

The education of Antonina Brunowska had been a somewhat curious mixture of extremes. Having lost her mother in her infancy, she had until the age of fourteen been brought up, or rather allowed to run wild, by an indulgent father, who could not make up his mind either to part with his only child or to attempt the task of controlling her. There were governesses in the house, of course; but they seldom stayed there for longer than three months at a time, and the intervals that elapsed before a suitable successor was found were generally longer than this, so that it is scarcely paradoxical to say that on the whole there were more intervals than governesses. It could, therefore, be no wonder if Antonina, before whom every person in her father's service bowed down as to their future ruler, and whose small hand was reverently kissed by white-headed peasants on the road, should grow up imperious and exacting, deeply impressed with the sense of her own importance, and unable to bear the slightest touch of restraint.

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When she was fourteen her father died, and Antonina found herself abruptly transplanted into very different surroundings. An unmarried sister of her mother's was still living at Lemberg, and on his deathbed Tomasz Brunowska had bethought himself of his sister-in-law, and had desired that his daughter should be placed under the care of her aunt. In his heart of hearts he had long known that some such step would be unavoidable, and now that he would no longer be there to look on, he could even face the thought of the strict educational measures that would probably have to be employed.

The Baroness Mielecka was an elderly *élégante* who had spent most of her earlier years in Court circles, having been lady of honour, first to a dispossessed duchess, and then to an uncrowned queen. Her one ambition in life, besides that of dressing perfectly, was to live up to the level of a *fin-de-siècle* woman, although a close investigation would probably have shown that her ideas as to the meaning of the term were slightly hazy. To judge from appearances, the Baroness evidently believed that by covering the walls of her drawing-room with Japanese fans and peacocks' feathers, wearing the newest combinations of colours, reading the latest telegrams, and mixing up all that she had ever heard about either Women's Rights

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or the future mission of air-balloons, she was doing all that could be expected of a worthy representative of the latter end of the nineteenth century. This was what she wanted to be; what she really *was* was an empty-headed, good-natured, perfectly conventional, and perfectly harmless old maid, who during her sojourn at Court had got so used to having to dress well—the duchess, in especial, had been very particular as to the appearance of her *dames d'honneur*, and had been known to dismiss one because of the inferior quality of the lace on her bodice—that she could not now do without the delights of the wardrobe; who loved to dabble in socialistic ideas, and had yet never forgiven the people who had dispossessed her duchess and neglected to crown her queen; who delighted in posing as an atheist, although in secret she wore two scapulars and three blest medals next her skin, and went regularly to church on Sundays, in order not to shock people "with prejudices."

The prospects of having a niece to educate, as well as to dress, filled her with delight. Here was an opportunity for openly proclaiming her principles; for, of course, Antonina was to be turned out a model *fin-de-siècle* girl. But by the end of the first month she began to understand that her task was no easy one, and by the end of the first year she had given it up. The material had proved

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too tough to be worked upon by the delicate fingers of the ex-*dame d'honneur*. Antonina had evidently no idea of being "turned" into anything. The affection which the lonely *élégante*—for she was lonely, in spite of her dresses—felt for her pupil had from the first been tinged with a feeling of alarm. She had undertaken to tame a wild bird that had been brought to her in a cage—a wild bird fresh from its native woods, and quivering with youth and life; but the bird had a strong beak and sharp claws, and once having felt them, the frightened old maid was thankful to capitulate, and to let the captive do almost what it liked, so long as it did not fly straight into her face.

The result was that in the capital Antonina was just as much the spoilt child as she had been at home. Her aunt had the satisfaction of choosing her dresses and her hats for her, but that was about all. She could superintend her *chaussure* but not her actions, polish her manners but not her mind, or at least not in the fashion that the Baroness, who was town-bred to the marrow of her bones, and in whom an almost holy horror of everything countrified, of everything that flavoured of the bumpkin, had survived from Court-days, would have wished. Very early indeed she began to despair of making Antonina conventional.

Antonina herself, though her whole nature drew

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her towards the freedom of the country and its more boisterous delights, of which she had drunk in such full draughts, was yet at that age when root is easily taken. Being thirsty for love, she had from the first attached herself with all her heart to her aunt, and partly for this reason she was not unhappy at Lemberg. What her nature wanted was an outlet, whether physical or mental did not greatly matter. Since she could no longer roam about at will in the big empty park at Berenów with her dogs at her heels, she sought solace in her aunt's bookcase, and threw herself with heart and soul into the earnest exploration of its shelves. When it is mentioned that this bookcase was furnished chiefly with volumes which Baroness Mielecka had selected because of what she considered a certain *fin-de-siècle* flavour about their titles, with which she counted upon impressing her friends, but very few of which she had managed to read beyond the first page, it will readily be understood that the mental food imbibed by Antonina at this period was of a somewhat perilous and likewise of an extremely miscellaneous nature. Now and then the Baroness, catching sight of some volume in her niece's hands, would be visited by a twinge of uneasiness; but the twinge would pass again, for in the first place free reading belonged to the principles of Women's Rights, and in the second,

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and far more important place, she knew that Antonina would not give up the book if called upon to do so.

Russian authors figured largely on the shelves, and it was to be considered as a piece of remarkable good fortune that, in this case, the result of free reading was nothing worse than a violent access of ideas and projects *à la* Tolstoi. By the time she was sixteen Antonina began to bewilder her aunt by her talk of "work," and of the duties of proprietors.

"My path is quite clear before me," she would explain to the startled Baroness. "That wonderful old man has told me everything I need to know. The very moment that I can do what I like——"

"You do what you like now," faintly interpolated the Baroness, but without being heard.

"I shall fly to Berenów and never leave it again. Berenów is the field which heaven has given to me, and I mean to live for it."

"But surely not for it alone, Antusia. When you marry——"

"I doubt whether I shall ever marry. I have thought over this matter a great deal, and I don't think that marrying is my vocation. You see, I don't believe I could manage to be decently obedient to my husband. At any rate, I could never

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consent to marry merely for the sake of being married; there would need to be something behind it, some object to be fulfilled, some real good to be done by marrying that particular man. But for managing Berenów I don't need a man, and it is Berenów that evidently is intended to be my field of work. Yes, darling aunt, I am going to live *for* Berenów and *at* Berenów, and of course you will live with me."

The Baroness heaved a resigned sigh. Truly, had she foreseen this result of the free reading, it is just possible that after all she would have found the courage to lock the door of the bookcase, and keep the key in her pocket.

Soon it became clear to Antonina that to wait until she was of age would be pure waste of time. If she could not yet actually realise her projects, she could at least study the battle-field, and prepare the ground.

The result of these conclusions—her guardian being fortunately as easy to manage as her aunt—was her descent upon Berenów in the August following on her eighteenth birthday.

And thus Antonina came back to her home, brimful of ideas, of hopes, of theories, trembling with impatience to test her own power; with all the vigor of her nature, all the strength of her youth and splendid vitality, brought to bear upon

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one point; feeling quite secure of her mission, though possibly not quite as clear in her mind as she fancied herself with regard to what this mission exactly consisted in. She was not a woman yet, but a headstrong and emotional child, full of contradictions, whose tears rose at the sight of a beggar in the street, and whom yet the faintest opposition made savage—a child with the power almost of a small sovereign in its hand, and of whom no one could yet foresee how she would use it.

The feeling that he was not wanted at present made Radford stay away from Berenów until the beginning of September. He could not stay away longer than this, for that which he had attempted to say to Stepan last time must absolutely be said. He had not by any means given up the hope of arguing him out of this terrible idea about the schoolmastership.

Like the last time, Stepan was at the schoolhouse, and like the last time, too, he was not at liberty. The schoolmistresses were indeed not visible, and the children had been dismissed; but having crossed the threshold, Radford observed that Antonina Brunowska was standing in the middle of the floor, talking with so much vivacity to the new schoolmaster that his entrance passed apparently unnoticed.

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The argument seemed to bear the character of a dispute. Antonina was evidently advocating the introduction of some measure which Stepan condemned as worthless.

"Worthless!" she was repeating as Radford entered, with ringing scorn in her voice. "Everything is called worthless that has not yet been tested. It is the stock phrase of all the enemies of progress—for heaven's sake don't use it, Lieutenant Milnovics—I cannot help still calling you a lieutenant," she added, while her voice sank a little and she glanced quickly towards his disabled arm, —"don't use it, please, or I shall have to put you down as one of those enemies. What would become of Progress if nothing new was ever to be attempted?"

"But this particular thing is not new at all," remarked Stepan, with a politely derisive smile. "It has been tried over and over again, and has failed just as often. I thought it was a commonplace that farmers are not made by theory, any more than soldiers are."

"That can only be the fault of the theory, or else of the teachers. If the theory is good, surely it stands to reason that the results must also be good. I have made up my mind to turn my people into model farmers, and I have made up my mind that you shall help me."

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Stepan broke into a somewhat irritated laugh.

"*You* want to turn the people into model farmers! Excuse me, Pani Brunowska, but you don't know what strange things you are saying. Why, even the smallest boy who comes to school with the most ragged shirt and the blackest finger-nails knows more about the proper season for sowing and reaping than either you or I do. No amount of books and of theories will ever induce our peasants to feed their cows with anything but what their great-grandfathers fed theirs with. Printed rules are merely objects of suspicion. You can open your agricultural class if you like; but I give you fair warning that no one will come to it."

"I shall make them come," said Antonina, a trifle haughtily, for the schoolmaster's tone was not quite as respectful as she had a right to expect. "Those old methods are all exploded. I wonder that you, who have studied and seen life, should talk as you do. Every one seems asleep here; certainly it was high time that I should come to wake you up. Do you really mean to maintain that everything is done as it ought to be done?"

"Nothing of the sort; I only maintain that the agricultural class is not the remedy for the evil."

"Then what is?"

"Example might be. Start a model farm according to your ideas, and let the people see for

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themselves that your crops are better than theirs."

"Of course I shall start a model farm, but for that I must be of age. My guardian is manageable about everything except money. But in the meantime I cannot possibly sit still. The agricultural class will pave the way. I have ordered the books already—five different works on agriculture; there were four more on the catalogue, but I thought these would do to begin with. And you must help me; you positively must help me, Lieutenant Milnovics. I have counted so firmly upon your help."

Her voice had become soft, almost coaxing. She moved a little nearer, and gazed at him with imploring eyes. She was not the imperious *Pani* now, but a child begging for a favour.

Stepan looked at her without immediately answering. He was hesitating, but the irritation on his face had already begun to vanish.

"What is the good of my saying either Yes or No? I cannot prevent your having your own way."

"But you can use your influence and make matters easier. It makes all the difference whether I have the schoolmaster on my side or not. You will help me, will you not? Please say Yes!" And unconsciously she half clasped her fingers.

"Let it be Yes, then, in the name of all that

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is unreasonable," said Stepan, smiling in spite of himself. The irritation was quite gone from his face.

"Splendid!" cried Antonina. "Now I have gained you!" and she impulsively gave him her hand.

Stepan took the small, exquisitely gloved hand, and, according to the Polish fashion, raised it respectfully to his lips.

"Yes, you have gained me," he repeated a little absently.

"I am rather glad you were so obstinate," went on Antonina gaily. "It is much more satisfactory to gain over an obstinate person than one who always says 'Yes' to everything, and besides——"

But at this moment she caught sight of Radford standing in the doorway, a passive and somewhat perplexed spectator.

"This is a visitor for you," she said, barely returning his bow, and looking at him with a mixture of displeasure and astonishment, as at a complete stranger. "We can settle the details later on." And snatching up the parasol which she had laid on the bench beside her, she turned in her somewhat brusque fashion and disappeared through the second door.

"Shall we go up to the house?" asked Stepan, bringing back his eyes to Radford's face.

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"No, let us stay here. I must talk to you, and here we shall not be interrupted."

Without waiting for Stepan's answer, he sat down on the bench that was nearest and began the attack. For several minutes he talked on undisturbed. The excellent and carefully prepared reasons, which all went to prove the reasonableness of accepting the confidential post in Vienna and the unreasonableness of remaining a schoolmaster at Berenów, were not refuted; indeed they were scarcely answered, but the result remained what it had been last time. Stepan was a schoolmaster, and meant to remain one. He spoke without irritation. There was in his manner less bitterness than there had been during the first discussion of this subject, and there was also more indifference. The short, vehement scene which had followed upon that discussion was to-day not touched upon with any word. It seemed almost as though Stepan had forgotten the incident.

"And you actually mean that this is your final decision?" asked Radford, at the end of ten fruitless minutes of argument.

"Not my decision," replied Stepan, a little wearily, "but the decision of Fate. To be a soldier was my wish, to be a schoolmaster is evidently my destiny."

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Radford contemplated his comrade for a minute in incredulous silence.

"It is quite true," he then said suddenly, "it is quite true what the Pani Brunowska was saying just now about your all being asleep here. It lies in the atmosphere; it is a torpor which holds you all. Even you, Stepan, even you are infected; you talk to-day not like yourself, but like a mixture of your aunt and your brother-in-law. You are sinking into this poisonous torpor; but it is not too late yet, there is still time to awake you."

Radford had risen as he spoke, and now, in the excess of his eagerness, took his comrade by the shoulder, in the way in which one man takes hold of another whom he wishes to shake out of deep slumber.

Stepan had not sat down. With his left arm leaning against the back of a chair, he gazed unmoved into Radford's disturbed face. His reply did not come at once, and his glance seemed to say that he was considering some question within himself.

"Perhaps it is torpor," he said at length. "Perhaps I am falling asleep. But why awake me? Is it not better so? People who are asleep escape a great deal. Yes, let me sleep, let me sleep!" he added with sudden vehemence, shaking Radford's hand from off his shoulder.

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"I do not understand you to-day," said Radford again, after another long look at his comrade. "You used to be different. It was not like you either to give in just now about that agricultural class; wasn't that what the *Pani* called it?"

"It's a piece of nonsense," remarked Stepan shortly. "She wants to start evening lectures on farming for any one under twenty. A mere absurdity."

"Then why did you end by saying that you would help her? You aren't generally so yielding, and you gave way quite suddenly, too. Don't you see that this also is torpor?"

"I suppose it is," said Stepan, looking from Radford's face to the open window. "Yes, very likely this too is torpor."

His black brows were drawn together in a perplexed frown.

"I forgot that I have still got to inquire at the shop whether the new copy-books have arrived," he remarked abruptly. "If you will walk on to the house I shall follow immediately."

And, taking his hat, he went out before Radford had time to make any further remark.

"I can go with you to the shop," the other called after him, but Stepan was in the street already.

Radford was on the point of following, when,

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from the opposite direction, he perceived Antonina Brunowska returning towards the schoolhouse.

"Probably she has something more to say to him," reflected Radford. "I shall wait till she has passed;" and he drew back a little from the doorway.

Instead of passing, however, Antonina came straight towards the schoolhouse, walking like somebody who has a very distinct object in her mind.

"Lieutenant Milnovics has just gone over to the shop," said Radford, stepping forward as she reached the door.

She stood still immediately, and looked at him for a few seconds steadily, and with the same astonishment as at first.

"I am not looking for Lieutenant Milnovics," she said at last. "I am looking for you. It is to you I must speak."

"For *me!*" repeated Radford in unbounded astonishment. "What on earth can you have to say to me?" he added under the influence of his first surprise.

Antonina coloured angrily. Already, as she approached the schoolhouse, Radford had fancied he saw an ominous light in her eyes, and a certain marked displeasure about the very manner in which she picked her way across the cart-ruts; but it had

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never for a moment occurred to him to connect these symptoms in any way with himself.

"I have a great deal to say to you," she replied, in a low but agitated voice. "I have only just realised who you are. You are the officer with the English name, are you not?—the same man who was at the *plebanija* on the day when I arrived? I did not immediately recognise you; you look quite different to-day."

She looked at him with inimical sharpness, as though to convince herself that there was indeed no mistake as to identity. And certainly there could be no doubt that Radford looked quite different to-day. In this Lancer lieutenant, with the brilliant golden hair, the brilliant blue eyes, and the brilliant uniform-coat, it was scarcely possible to recognise the dingy and hoarse miller-like individual of whom she had caught a glimpse last week.

"Yes, I am the same man," said Radford, still lost in wonder.

"Then you are the person I am looking for; you are the cruel and unscrupulous man who is the cause of poor Lieutenant Milnovics's misfortune. I came to look for you, because I felt that I could not meet you again in a conventional manner without first having told you what I really think of you. I cannot bear pretences. In public I shall have to be polite to you, I suppose; but first I must tell

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you in private that in my eyes you are a—well, very nearly a murderer."

"Has Stepan told you the story?" asked Radford, after a short pause of consternation, taken aback, in spite of himself, by the epithet.

"No, he has told me nothing; he is far too generous to speak, but I have found out. I made Father Floryan tell me everything; and since I know all, it is incomprehensible to me how you can even eat and sleep. You *do* eat and sleep, do you not?"

"I do," admitted Radford, shamefacedly.

"I thought you didn't look as if you either watched or starved," said Antonina between her teeth, with a revengeful glance at the healthy young face before her. "Do you never tell yourself that you have ruined an existence, disappointed the hopes of a whole family?"

"I often tell myself that," murmured Radford.

But the question had only been put for form's sake, and the answer was unheard.

"I don't know what you fought about—a mere trifle, Father Floryan says, and you were the challenger. Not that any cause can really justify a duel; but when the cause is small the injustice appears all the larger. And because of this mere trifle, and because you couldn't keep your temper, poor Lieutenant Milnovics has been sacrificed

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—a man of his abilities, of his intellect, of his noble qualities! Oh, how can you ever forgive yourself?"

She stopped, with her blazing eyes full upon him, and in the midst of their fire Radford was astonished to see some suddenly risen tears glistening. He knew that they were tears of pity for Milnovics.

"She takes a deep interest in this affair," it crossed his mind to say.

Aloud he said nothing at all, but stood looking into Antonina's agitated face. He was far, yet, from having recovered his presence of mind, neither was he able to analyse his sensations. Here were the reproaches which he had sought for so long in vain; here, at last, was some one who was ready to look upon him as a criminal: ought he not to be satisfied? To be condemned was exactly what he had wished for; but now that he had got what he wanted, he perceived to his astonishment that the sensation was not by any means unconditionally agreeable. The identical terms which he had applied to himself had a completely different and much harsher sound when coming from other lips.

"And she does not know all yet!" he reflected, with a distinct accession of alarm. "Had I not better tell her that I fought the wrong man, and get it over once for all? But, after all, why? I

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think I have had about enough for one day, and it is no business of hers that I can see. I wonder why she has taken up the cause so hotly?"

"Have you nothing to say?" inquired Antonina, tapping the floor impatiently with the point of her parasol.

Radford became aware that he was still standing silent before her, in very truth like a condemned man before his judge. In point of fact he had nothing to say, and yet he would have spoken had not the appearance of the big schoolmistress in the doorway put an end to the *tête-à-tête*.

"There can be no doubt that she takes an uncommon interest in the matter," was Radford's reflection, as he walked up to the *plebanija* alone. "But an interest in the matter presupposes an interest in the man. H'm, that would be strange indeed—very strange."

And then he fell to wondering a little uneasily whether he had looked as foolish as he felt while Antonina Brunowska had been uttering her reproaches.

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CHAPTER XII.

Late that night Radford, lying awake in the dark, was suddenly visited by an idea. So strong was the hold which the unexpected thought took upon him, that instinctively he sat up in bed and began to grope about for the matches. This required to be thought out immediately, and in order to think more clearly he must have light.

The idea was but an outcome—the climax, as it were, of reflections entertained during his homeward ride. Antonina Brunowska took an interest in Milnovics; might not this interest possibly develop into affection? This was what the idea amounted to. Probably she only felt pity as yet; but the pity of a woman towards a man had often been known to develop into love, and in that case——

"O my God! in that case," said Radford, speaking aloud under the pressure of this new excitement, "all may yet be well!"

In every inspiration there is an element of intoxication, and it was with the force of an inspira-

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tion that this idea had come upon him. A marriage between Antonina Brunowska and Stepan Milnovics would, at one blow, put everything right again that had been wrong before. As the rich and happy husband of the *Pani*, Stepan would scarcely miss his right arm—would, in fact, have no real use for it. He would therefore cease to belong to the unfortunates, which for Alfred Radford meant the blotting out of that terrible day in April from which dated this unbearable burden of self-reproach. To have this brought about would be almost the same as washing from his forehead the mark which, in his own imagination, burned as redly as the mark of Cain. From that moment forward it would again become possible to live for other things,—possible and permissible to enjoy all that his own good fortune was pressing upon him, and that the animal side of his nature, unknown to the spiritual side, was longing to enjoy, but whose taste in the mouth had for months past been bitter.

"It must be brought about; it shall be brought about!"

As he spoke the words he was thinking only of Stepan. He could not be aware that not the interest of Stepan Milnovics alone, but also to some degree that of Alfred Radford, was pushing him to the decision; just as little as he knew that in the

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very movement with which he threw up his head, there lay not only the resolution of saving his friend, but also the instinctive desire to throw off a burden which had begun to grow irksome to himself.

It was probable that there might be difficulties in the way. For Antonina Brunowska to marry the son of a village priest would undoubtedly be considered a *mésalliance;* but to judge from what Radford had seen of her, Antonina was not governed by conventional ideas, and besides, difficulties can be overcome; and in this case of course he, Alfred Radford, was the proper person to overcome them. Here at last was the moment for which he had lain in wait all summer—the opportunity of rendering to Milnovics a valuable and lasting service. All his efforts, whether direct or indirect, must tend in this direction.

But how about Stepan himself? How would he think of the matter? It always was hard to find out what Stepan thought of any matter; nevertheless, Radford resolved to make the attempt, and at their very next meeting actually made it. Of course he had no idea of being indiscreet; but he felt that he could not rest without sounding Stepan, and therefore took the earliest opportunity of suggesting to him, *en passant*, that the *Pani* seemed to take a more than ordinary interest in his welfare.

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The effect of this harmless remark was very different from what he had calculated. At the mention of Antonina Brunowska's name Stepan rose abruptly from his seat, with a flush on his face, and stood looking at his comrade, almost in the same way in which he had looked at him on the day when, starting from his pillows, he had refused the proffered friendship.

"It is a ridiculous idea," he said angrily; "I cannot imagine what could put such folly into your head. Antonina Brunowska has a good heart; she pities all unfortunate people, and I am unfortunate —that is all."

"But it seems to me more than ordinary pity," remarked Alfred, somewhat taken aback.

"It is a ridiculous idea," repeated Stepan. "Never speak to me about it again, and mind you never speak to any one else about it either. Do you understand me, Radford?"

"I understand," said the crestfallen Alfred.

This short interview had quite put him out of his calculations. Stepan was evidently unapproachable on this subject; but what could be the cause of this? Could it be that his fancy had already been taken captive elsewhere? But by whom? The only two women in the village who were not peasants were the two schoolmistresses. Radford called up in memory the figures both of the big and of

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the little schoolmistress, and instinctively shook his head.

"They can neither of them stand beside Antonina Brunowska," was his inward reflection. "Just look at her eyes and theirs! I suppose both those girls have got eyes, because I did not notice that either of them was blind, though that is all I know about it; but no one surely could forget that he had seen Antonina Brunowska's eyes. They are something beyond mere organs of sight. No, it is not possible that Stepan should be so blind!"

The failure of this first attempt had convinced Radford that it would be advisable to further matters in a somewhat less direct fashion; and having for several days reflected upon the various ways and means that stood at his command, he ended by resolving to begin with a call at the Berenów house.

Considering the circumstances of his last interview with Antonina, the resolve was a bold one, comparable almost to the temerity of bearding a lion in his den; but the very alarm which he distinctly felt at the prospect of being again taken to task, only served to strengthen his resolution. His own sensations could be of no consequence so long as he was serving Stepan's cause; and it was clear that, in order to serve that cause, even indirectly, he must become a little better acquainted with the second of the chief personages in this affair.

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Nevertheless Radford was not entirely free from nervousness when one afternoon, early in October, he was ushered into the big drawing-room at Berenów. It was a very big drawing-room indeed, and to the visitor's Anglo-Austrian eyes it seemed strangely empty. Half-a-dozen large mirrors in tarnished gold frames, a set of yellow damask chairs, a couple of small sofas without cushions, a couple of large tables without drapings, an ancient-looking pianoforte—this was the sum of the furniture which stood about in islands on a sea of carpetless floor. Everything was solid, even costly; but everything too was faded, fly-blown, uncared for, with the double neglect of disuse and of true Polish unthriftiness. The corner of the room where stood the big stove alone bore a physiognomy of its own; for Baroness Mielecka had lost no time in covering at least a few yards of wall with her Japanese fans and her peacocks' feathers, without which she never moved from home.

"It takes away a little of this awful *ancien régime* look under which the rest of the room labours," had been her remark to Antonina—and Antonina had readily acquiesed, for this was a point on which aunt and niece agreed, just as the *ancien régime* was one of the few fragments of her aunt's talk which Antonina had unconsciously assimilated.

Both ladies were very busy to-day, as Radford

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became aware on entering. Not with the Japanese fans, however, but with what looked like several bales of white and of red cotton stuff that were lying about upon the chairs, as well as spread upon the piano. Baroness Mielecka, with a yard-measure in her hand, was discussing some question with animation, while Antonina stood by, impatiently clicking a large pair of scissors. On one of the tables lay hanks of red cotton and open boxes containing big glass beads of every imaginable colour.

"I hope I am not disturbing you," began Radford, slightly disconcerted.

At sight of the visitor the Baroness had broken off her harangue, and Antonina turned round quickly with the scissors still in her hand.

"Oh, it is you," she said, after a moment of astonishment. She looked at Radford as though she were hesitating what to do.

"Is she going to have me turned out of the house?" it passed through Radford's mind to ask himself.

All she did, however, was to give him a somewhat ungracious little nod, and to say briefly to her aunt: "Lieutenant Radford, whom I met at the *plebanija*."

This was as much as to say that he was accepted as a visitor. Evidently the sense of hospitality had triumphed over other feelings.

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"This is a most unceremonious reception," said the ex-*dame d'honneur*, with a gesture of distress indicating the various piles on the chairs. "I trust you will excuse us."

"Please do not let me disturb you," said Radford, with a touch of shyness.

"I am not dreaming of letting you disturb me," replied Antonina in place of her aunt. "If you want to sit down I suppose you can clear a chair for yourself; I cannot possibly interrupt my cutting-out. There, this will be long enough for the skirt, will it not, Aunt Pawlina?"

"Wait one second more, Antusia; have you calculated the hem?" asked the Baroness, darting back to the piano. "There is nothing so unbecoming as too short a skirt."

"But the peasants all show their ankles," objected Antonina.

"Is it a peasant dress which you are making?" inquired Radford, somewhat puzzled.

Baroness Mielecka sighed, as though at the mention of a painful subject. Despite that sigh, this had been the happiest day she had known since the beginning of her banishment. To a true lover of *chiffons*, the combination of a bale of stuff, even though it be only cotton, of a yard-measure, and of a pair of scissors is always irresistible, and however bitterly she might disapprove of the ultimate

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destination of this particular *chiffon*, the Baroness could not help being cheered up in spite of herself by so congenial an occupation.

"Yes; it is a peasant dress which we have been planning," she said, in answer to Radford's question. "I do believe it is going to turn out almost pretty." She sighed a second time, and, with a glance towards Antonina, added regretfully: "These things are frightfully clumsy, of course, but the dress suits her wonderfully well; for a costume-ball, for instance, it might have been quite passable."

"You know very well that I shall never go either to a costume-ball or to any other sort of ball," said Antonina's voice severely from the other side of the room, where she was still operating with the scissors. "It is for earnest work that I require the dress, not for mere frivolity. It will help me to get nearer the people, by making me more like them."

The Baroness shook her head. "You know what I think of the experiment, Antusia; it is *risque* in the extreme. My niece believes," she added, turning again to the visitor, "that by wearing the costume of the villagers she will gain more influence over them; while I believe that she will only lose their respect, and probably also spoil the shape of her waist."

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"Tolstoi goes about as a peasant," remarked Antonina.

"Tolstoi has got no waist to spoil, neither is he burdened by feminine responsibilities. It is my belief, Lieutenant Radford,—and no doubt you will agree with me,—it is my firm belief that every woman is bound in conscience to dress as well as her means will allow her, until the very verge of her grave. If my niece's principles were the same as mine, you may be certain that all this cotton stuff would not be littering the room, while three gems of autumn costumes, with the basting-threads scarcely out of them, are hanging unused in her wardrobe."

With a gesture of almost dramatic resignation, the Baroness took a strip of embroidery from the table and began to fill in the red and black stitches. Sitting there, with the folds of a rich blue-grey cashmere falling softly around her meagre limbs, and a morsel of costly lace crowning the bleached and spare but none the less carefully dressed hair, the former lady of honour might well be taken for a living illustration of the principle she had just enunciated.

"May I ask why you do not go to balls?" asked Radford, looking at Antonina.

"Because it is against my principles," replied Antonina briefly.

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"Are your principles so severe? I thought young ladies never fixed their principles until they were of age."

"Antonina's principles have been lying all ready ever since she was fifteen," murmured the Baroness despondently.

"But what do you see wrong in balls?" began Radford, and then quickly pulled himself up. It had occurred to him that it was not to talk about Antonina's principles that he had come here, but in order to drop favourable remarks about Stepan. By some means or other Stepan's name had got to be introduced.

"And what does Father Floryan say to the new experiment?" he inquired, a little hastily. "Have you asked his advice, or that of his son, the schoolmaster?"

He reddened slightly at his own words, feeling that it was awkwardly done, and yet glad that he had done it.

"I am not very fond of asking for advice," replied Antonina.

She had finished her cutting-out now, and had ensconced herself on the sofa, where she sat stitching away eagerly, half buried in white and scarlet billows.

"I wish Stepan were here to see her now," reflected Radford. "That red colour sets off her hair

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wonderfully. Is it black or brown, by the by? I wonder what she looks like to Stepan's eyes. Surely the man cannot be made of wood. I remember that I found some faults about her the first time; but of course one gets accustomed to faults, or perhaps they were only imperfections. Let me see—what were they? I seem to have lost sight of them somehow."

"But in a question of this sort," he began aloud, clearing his throat anew, "surely the opinion of an old man like Father Floryan ought to have some weight, or even that of his son, for I assure you that Stepan is not like other young men; he is only a few years older than I am, but he is far more sensible, far——"

"Far less imprudent," supplemented Antonina, glancing up for one second from her work.

Radford bit his lip, for he understood quite well what she meant.

"Exactly, far less imprudent," he repeated steadily. "I have known him for a good many months now, and I can assure you that he is not only a very noble-minded man, but also a man whose counsel can be relied on, a most deep thinker—in one word, altogether an exceptional person."

Antonina looked up again, and this time her hands dropped for a moment in her lap.

"I don't need your assurance, Lieutenant Rad-

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ford," she said, with dawning surprise in her eyes. "I am quite convinced already that Lieutenant Milnovics is an exception in every way. But what astonishes me is that——"

"*I* should be the person to talk about this; that is what astonishes you, is it not? I know that in your eyes I am a—murderer, *his* murderer; you have told me so plainly enough."

He spoke with a certain soreness in his tone, of which he himself was not aware.

"You had better not speak so loud unless you want my aunt, too, to know what you are," replied Antonina frigidly, while glancing towards Baroness Mielecka, who was busy at a little distance pouring out tea, for the inevitable *samovar* had by this time made its appearance.

"At least she has not betrayed me to her aunt," reflected Radford, with a curious thrill of satisfaction.

His cup of tea was brought to him at this moment, and he took it gratefully from the Baroness's hands. This was better certainly than being ordered out of the house. Outside, the leaves were falling fast in the chilly autumn twilight; while here the steam of the *samovar*, the crackle of the wood fire in the big porcelain stove, as well as those small, busily stitching fingers which he watched across the table—all combined to give a

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pleasant and home-like aspect to the scene. It may have been this consciousness, almost as much as the reflection that the first step on his mission had been successfully taken, that served to spread within him an unexpected sense of ease and comfort.

"Does it not seem natural to you," he asked, in a somewhat lower voice, as soon as the Baroness was back beside the tea-table, "that exactly *I* should wish to speak well of Stepan?"

"You mean probably as an atonement?" said Antonina, a little contemptuously. "You seem to belong to the sort of people who think that black deeds can be mended by pleasant words."

Her needle was moving in and out of the cotton stuff with an almost vicious rapidity, and the brighter colour in her cheek betrayed that her emotion had again caught fire at the subject thus brought up anew.

"Antusia, my love," the Baroness's voice was heard at this moment, "pray attend to whether Lieutenant Radford has got sugar enough in his tea. I must ask Jozefa whether she has seen my silver thimble, the one I got from the Duchess; this one does not fit me."

As the door closed, Antonina let her work drop in her lap, and looked up straight at Radford. In both pairs of eyes there was a challenge written.

"This is the right moment, there need be no

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pretences now," it passed through both their minds to say.

"How do you know that I belong to that sort of people?" asked Radford, before Antonina had time to speak.

"I do not know it, but I suspect it. Oh, how I wish that I could awake you to a sense of the terrible injustice you have committed!"

"And what proof have you that I am not awake to it?"

"For an Englishman the guilt is all the heavier," she went on, unheeding. "For the English are the only people who have had the sense to abolish the duel. And you are a sort of Englishman, are you not?"

"I don't quite know what I am. My father is an Englishman, and I do all my thinking in English; but I have not been in England since my babyhood."

"No matter; that is enough to make you an Englishman."

"But I am also an Austrian officer."

"Well, and what of that?"

"As long as I am an Austrian officer I shall have to take the possibility of duels into my calculations. Duelling may be nonsense, but do you think it is quite fair to put down the guilt to me rather than to public opinion? As matters now

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stand, a man has no other means of defending his honour. This was my predicament: my honour had been attacked, or at least I considered that the remarks which had been made——"

He broke off abruptly, and stared at Antonina with wide eyes which were full of something that resembled horror. To his consternation he had discovered that he was actually defending himself, attempting to justify his own action, which yet in his heart of hearts he so utterly condemned. How had this come about? How had it begun? Had he not come here in order to speak well of Stepan? By what combination of circumstances had he drifted into speaking well of himself? In his sudden confusion he could not exactly remember. Had he not himself desired to be a criminal in the eyes of mankind? and if in the eyes of mankind, then why not in those of Antonina Brunowska?

"What is the matter with you?" inquired Antonina, a little startled; "are you ill?"

"No, no; it was only an idea. Please forget what I said just now. It is not true that I was in any predicament. I know quite well that I alone was to blame, and I know also that words do not cure blows. I have sworn to myself to atone to Stepan for the harm I have done him."

"And in what way do you mean to atone?"

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asked Antonina, looking at him still doubtfully, yet with a beginning of approval in her eyes.

"That I cannot say for certain yet," answered Radford hurriedly, for the Baroness's step was heard just outside the door. "But some way of atonement I shall certainly discover."

"I have found my silver thimble," said the Baroness, entering. "It would most infallibly have broken my heart to lose the dear Duchess's *souvenir*."

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CHAPTER XIII.

With the new hope which he had in view Radford began to find it more and more difficult to keep away from Berenów. When he was not there in person he was there in thought, mentally watching the progress of his scheme. All seemed to be going well; even this was well that he had at length succeeded in convincing Antonina of the reality of his repentance, for if he was to further Stepan's interests he must not be regarded with animosity by the *Pani.*

Before the end of the month he had ventured to repeat his visit at the Berenów house, and meeting with a distinctly warm reception on the part of the Baroness Mielecka, though only with a neutrally coloured one on the part of her niece, had grown bold enough to call again after only a week's interval. His visits to the *plebanija* did not become less frequent, but the *plebanija* was now no longer the sole object of that eight miles' ride.

"It is gayer up there at the big house, is it not?" Father Floryan remarked, with his uncom-

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plaining smile, on an occasion on which Radford had cut short his visit in order to inquire after the health of the Baroness, who was suffering from a cold in her head. "You are right to go up there, my son. Here in our home it is not gay." He sighed softly but deeply, and laying his hand within Radford's arm, added in a hurried whisper, "It is not music that I long for, or many voices talking, but I will tell you what is the matter with our house: it is too still. If it had pleased Him above to have put only one baby into the house, then my life would have been full. If Agniecka, for instance—— But it has not pleased Him, and that is enough.

This was not the first time that Radford had caught a glimpse of the *Popa's* secret standing grief, jealously guarded from the eyes of his own children. For this old priest with the toothless smile and the unsteady knees had a secret in his life. Few of his friends suspected that, far down in the depths of his much-tried and well-nigh spotless soul, Father Floryan cherished a hidden and devouring passion,—the passion for children, for *small* children, the smaller the better, the more squalling and the more obstreperous the more warmly welcome to this embodiment of human peace. It could only be the laws of contrast that were here at work, for the fact itself was incontest-

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able. Different people have got different sorts of ideals: some dream of reaching the North Pole, others of shooting a sixteen-antler stag, others again of having their novels favourably reviewed in the weeklies. Father Floryan's ideal was to rock a cradle, dandle a baby on his knee, work its rattle for it and dry its nose—in other words, to be a grandfather; and Fate having so far withheld grandchildren, the position was so trying that even the quintessence of resignation as practised by the *Popa* could not always suppress a momentary half-rebellious upheaval of the soul, though invariably and speedily repented of with much self-accusation.

"If Stepan marries Antonina," reflected Radford, "he may be made happy yet."

"I am talking foolishly; be certain never to repeat my words to anybody," said Father Floryan in his ear, and then unexpectedly dropped his visitor's arm.

"That is Stepan at the gate," he said, in a different tone, and, murmuring something incoherent, moved rapidly towards the house.

For some time past the *Popa* had been very careful not to be seen alone with Radford—that is to say, not to be so seen by Stepan's eyes. The truth was that he had never quite got over the fright of the short scene which had taken place be-

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tween him and his son on the occasion of the fifty-florin note which had been offered and almost accepted. He had not been able to forget the words which Stepan had then said, and he still trembled at the bare idea of that threat—for it was a threat which had been spoken—being carried into effect. A break between Stepan and his comrade would be the final destruction of an indefinite and scarcely acknowledged hope; for in Radford, Father Floryan still vaguely believed he saw a saving agent, the one individual in the world through whom some sort of good might still possibly come to his poor unfortunate boy, the one link which still connected him with the luckier portion of mankind.

It was almost invariably at the schoolhouse that Radford now met Antonina, and consequently almost invariably in Stepan's company. Would the school-work interest her so much if the schoolmaster were uninteresting to her? This was a question which he put to himself very frequently in these days, and which he invariably ended by answering with No. If certainty on this point was still awanting, this certainty was brought to him by a conversation which he had with Antonina early in November.

He had met her in the sitting-room of the *plebanija*, and for the moment they were *en tete-a-tete*. Antonina was waiting for the return of Stepan, who

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had gone to the schoolhouse to collect certain items of information, and Radford meanwhile was keeping her company. Antonina, as was not unusual with her, had been talking about her idol, Tolstoi.

"He is a giant. I cannot tell you what miserable pigmies most other men appear to me beside him. That is a life with an object in it. And it is the same with the heroes in his stories; they all know what they are living for; each has got some distinct end held before his eyes, and the end is always good to mankind in some shape. That is why I love him; he cannot even conceive a life without an object."

"And to make those that stand nearest you happy, is that no object in your eyes?"

Antonina frowned throughtfully at the bare boards of the floor.

"I know what you want to say—the usual talk about woman's proper sphere, and so on. I have thought about that, and I won't say that I quite reject the idea, but I could never be satisfied with that alone; I should require something more. There are so many other things to be done in the world, so many unfortunates to be helped."

"And to save one of these unfortunates from his destiny," said Radford, upon some sudden impulse, "would that be an object?"

"Yes, that would be an object," said Antonina,

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looking past him towards the dome of the little wooden church, which, from where she sat, was visible between the almost bare branches of the limes and birches. Her eyes seemed to him to kindle as she spoke.

"Yes, that would be a real object; to take one of these unfortunates out of the hands of Fate, to cover him with a shield, to heal his wounds and live for him—die for him if it must be; that would be something to make life noble and great, something to let one feel that one has not uselessly come into the world and left it."

"Happy unfortunate!"

Radford did not know that he had said the words aloud until Antonina, turning sharply from the window, gave him a startled glance. "Have you dared to guess my secret?" the proud eyes seemed to him to say quite distinctly, while the delicate cheeks were suffused by a deep colour, which might have arisen either from displeasure or from embarrassment.

From this moment forward Radford could no longer doubt that matters were progressing exactly as they ought. To his anxiously watching eyes it seemed as though even in his comrade there was a distinct and significant change. As autumn slowly faded into winter, Stepan appeared to him to be visibly altering. Sometimes he was seen to smile,

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and at other moments his eyes would light up suddenly without any apparent cause. He had grown younger within these last months, more talkative, "more like other people," as Radford put it to himself.

The symptoms on all sides were so good that this anxious observation of their development seemed to have become superfluous. And yet Radford's attention showed no signs of relaxing. Observation, a close and constant observation, had become for him an occupation so absorbing that, for some reason as yet unknown to himself, he was unable to break himself of the habit. To watch intently every shade of expression on either of the two faces when Stepan and Antonina were together, to catch the exact tone in which they replied to each other, and then to analyse and draw conclusions, —this was now a necessity for Radford. But why these conclusions, being ever the same, should require to be drawn over and over again, or why, though eminently favourable to his project, they should fail to bring to him a final feeling of satisfaction,—this he was unable to explain, and indeed never stopped to analyse.

It was a day near the middle of November which, by placing him face to face with the truth, brought the solution of these various riddles.

On the afternoon of that day the Baroness Mie-

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lecka was sitting alone in the big yellow drawing-room awaiting the return of her niece, who was at the schoolhouse. For half an hour past the *samovar* had been steaming away uselessly on the table. The Baroness was tenderly attached to her afternoon tea, a habit which she had learned from an English princess whom the uncrowned queen used occasionally to visit; but a certain ingrained habit of *étiquette* would not allow her to enjoy her own cup before Antonina's arrival. Antonina might be a child, and a very trying child too, but the pensioned-off lady of honour could not forget that she was the mistress of the house, and therefore had the right—nay, the duty—to claim precedence.

"This cannot go on," she commented, as with anxious eyes she scanned the double row of poplars, on whose leafless tops the crows' nests had become suddenly conspicuous as great, unwieldy, black lumps. "I must really speak to Antonina."

She had been telling herself this for at least three weeks past, but had as yet found countless pretexts for putting off the dreaded moment. Indeed, had it not been for the irritation of that postponed cup of tea, it is quite possible that Antonina might not have been "spoken to" yet for several more weeks to come. But the cup of tea had done

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it. The very moment that the door at length opened, the Baroness, feeling probably that delay would not strengthen her courage, rushed blindly into the battle.

"This is enough," she began excitedly, before her niece had closed the door behind her. "This sort of thing cannot go on, Antonina; I tell you so positively."

"What sort of thing?" asked Antonina, standing still in sheer astonishment just inside the door.

She was dressed in the white, red-embroidered shirt and scarlet skirt of a Ruthenian peasant. Beads were round her neck, and a brilliant cotton handkerchief bound her dark hair. Her eyes shone brightly, and she had entered the room still humming a gay tune, for this had been her first public appearance in peasant dress, and the success of her *début* had elated her.

"This way of going on; this running about in the village by yourself at all hours of the day and almost of the night; and now this ridiculous dress into the bargain! You forget my responsibilities. I have come to the conclusion that I cannot suffer such doings to continue."

Antonina looked at her very quietly, and did not reply until she had, with ostentatious leisure, ensconced herself upon a sofa.

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"Ah! so that is the conclusion you have come to, is it?" she asked, while settling her head upon the sofa-back in an attitude which afforded her a good full view of her aunt. "And now please tell me what means you have decided to adopt in order to act upon your conclusion? For I suppose you mean to act upon it, do you not?"

The Baroness's false courage began suddenly to give way. She knew that all too measured tone, just as she knew that peculiar brilliancy of the pupils fixed full upon her. They were old acquaintances, dating from the days when she had first undertaken to tame this wild bird—symptoms which never failed to appear the very moment that the faintest shade of opposition was scented in the air.

She was still as angry as ever, but, unconsciously, she began to temporise.

"It is my duty to act upon it, Antonina; you cannot but admit that fact, surely. You must not forget that it was your father's wishes which confided you to my care. I have experience, while you——"

"You have not told me yet what you mean to do," interrupted Antonina, in that same hard voice.

"But I am doing it now, am I not? I am telling you my opinion."

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"And if I prefer to be guided by my own opinions?"

"I should have to—well, I suppose I should be forced to appeal to your guardian."

"Would you really?" The brown eyes grew a little more dangerously bright.

"I should have no choice, Antusia."

The Baroness had grown almost deprecating. The memory of a hundred such struggles, in each of which her side had been the losing one, had arisen to damp her ardour. Inwardly she was asking herself why she had been mad enough to utter this challenge; but it was too late to beat a complete retreat.

"I should really have no choice. How can I reconcile it with my duties to look on passively while you are harming yourself unawares? Do you not know how ill-natured the world is?—what sharp eyes it has? what poisonous tongues? And do you not know that you, in your position, are ten times more conspicuous than the majority of young girls?"

"And what has the world got to do with my actions, pray?"

She was sitting up straight now, and the colour in her cheek showed that she was beginning to grow excited.

"It sees them, and that is enough. Do you not

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understand that in all that has been going on in these last weeks the gossips of Lemberg will find food for talking all winter?"

"What do you mean by what has been going on in these last weeks?"

"These doings in the school, and this—this constant intercourse with the schoolmaster."

The Baroness stopped, with a sort of gulp. The thing was done at last. This was the point towards which she had been nervously steering all along, and which now, for good or for evil, she had actually reached.

"So that is it," said Antonina harshly, without lowering her eyes. "I begin to understand."

"He may be a very worthy young man," the Baroness went on hastily, "and even very excellent; but surely you must know that *tête-à-têtes* between even excellent young men and irreproachable young girls are quite unusual in good society."

"*Used* to be quite unusual," corrected Antonina, in a voice which rung with infinite scorn. "The *ancien régime* has, of course, all sorts of ridiculous restrictions; but since when have you become an advocate of the *ancien régime*, Aunt Pawlina? Do you know that, to hear you talk, nobody could possibly guess that you had ever advocated Women's Rights? It would have been only fair to

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warn me that you had renounced your convictions."

"I never said that I had renounced them," almost stammered the Baroness. Her own weapons were being turned against her, and she had no shield for her defence. "It is not that I have altered my personal opinions, but some cases are exceptional; and don't you see that I really cannot reconcile it with my conscience—that is to say, with my social responsibility," corrected the Baroness, aware that the first term had an anything but *fin-de-siècle* sound about it—"to let things go on like this? And besides," she talked on, feeling that the ground was slipping further and further from under her feet, and with a desperate effort to gain a surer footing, "it would be a different matter altogether if the man in question were a different one. I am far from being so narrow-minded as to object to a reasonably free intercourse between young people; but when there is a danger of other sentiments intervening, then there should at least be a prospect of—of—well, of a final understanding."

"And why should there not be a prospect of a final understanding, as you call it, between Lieutenant Milnovics and myself?"

"Good gracious, Antusia!" said Baroness Mielecka, below her breath.

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It was not so much the fact of Antonina admitting the possibility of marriage for herself which dumbfounded her, for of late various remarks dropped at random had led the Baroness to suppose that her niece seemed inclined to reconsider her resolution of leading a single life; rather it was a vivid and depressing vision of this marriage in particular.

"No, no, it cannot be!" she went on, recovering a little of her volubility under the influence of this new terror; "you do not know what you are talking about. You, who will have the nobles of the land at your feet, and he the son of a simple village priest! Why, it is a quite impossible *parti!* And even as a man I cannot imagine what you see about that morose, unfriendly creature. And then those coats he wears! No, Antonina, you cannot seriously think of marrying a man who wears those awful coats! If it had been the other one, for instance, his friend with the blue eyes, who talks so nicely when he comes here, and whose uniform fits so beautifully, then *à la bonheur.* That would be a different matter altogether. His name may not be very great, but it is evident that he is well connected on his mother's side, and his fortune is said to be considerable."

"I thought you were talking of Lieutenant Milnovics," put in Antonina sharply. "What on earth

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has the other lieutenant got to do with the question?"

"Nothing," admitted the Baroness, with a quick sigh; while to herself she added, "Nothing as yet, but who knows what may yet come?"

"I only meant to bring home to you more forcibly the utter preposterousness of such—such an idea as the one we have just been discussing with regard to that—schoolmaster, for, after all, he is nothing but that, and to get you to acknowledge that to go on meeting him as you have been doing lately would only be an unnecessary challenge to public opinion."

Antonina looked steadily at her aunt for a few seconds; then, without speaking, she rose deliberately from the sofa, and, stepping up to a large clumsy piece of furniture which had been her father's writing-table, opened a drawer, from which she took out a small box. With this box in her hand, and still without a word, she went towards the door, settling the cotton handkerchief on her head as she went.

"Antusia! what do you mean? Where are you going?" asked the Baroness in a terrified whisper.

Antonina turned round just before reaching the door. The angry colour had gone from her face, leaving her almost pale, and when she spoke it

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seemed as though she had some difficulty in unlocking her teeth.

"I have just remembered that they require new steel pens at the school to-morrow. I promised the schoolmaster"—she pronounced the word with a certain spiteful distinctness—"to let him have a box in good time. I am therefore going to him—to the schoolmaster—to take him the pens. Do you understand me, Aunt Pawlina?"

"But, in God's name!—Antusia, you must be mad; it is almost dark! Why can you not send the pens?"

"Because I choose to take them myself, and because"—she came a step nearer, and her nostrils slowly dilated—"I consider myself quite old enough and quite sensible enough to regulate my own actions without any assistance from my friends and relations, and without any regard to what the world may amuse itself by saying about me. You can tell my guardian when you write to him that I mean to go on visiting the schoolhouse exactly as often as I have hitherto done. If he or you want to prevent me, then either he or you will have to lock me into my room—if you can get me there—and will have to take care that there is no ladder under the windows. Don't you think, by the by, that the Lemberg gossips will find more to talk about in this than in my visits to the school? And

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I will tell you more than this still—I will tell you that this young man, whom you stigmatise as a schoolmaster, and who wears baggy linen coats—I quite admit their bagginess—is far superior to all the young men whom I met in your drawing-room at Lemberg, and who, in spite of their lovely coats and boots, are fools beside him, one and all. He is a schoolmaster, you say; but in my eyes it is no disgrace to be a schoolmaster. I thought we had done with these musty old distinctions. A man has only got to be the right sort of man; and Stepan Milnovics is the right sort. He is high-minded, and he is highly gifted, and he is also very unfortunate. Is it because he is unfortunate, not through his own fault, that he is to be condemned—put aside as something which it is not worth while to stop and consider? Those are not my principles, Aunt Pawlina, as you very well know; but I have no more time to discuss principles now. I have told you that I am going to take these pens to the schoolhouse."

"Antusia, listen for one moment!" cried the Baroness, starting from her seat, only to sink back helplessly against the cushions, for the door had already closed. Darting to the window, she was just in time to see the slender figure disappearing into the twilight between the bare poplars. When it had quite vanished, Baroness Mielecka sat down

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on the nearest chair, and, overcome with a sense of utter powerlessness, burst into a flood of tears so copious as within a minute to reduce her delicately embroidered handkerchief to a limp, moist rag.

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CHAPTER XIV.

Arrived at the end of the poplar avenue, Antonina turned straight towards the village. There was still daylight enough to show her the familiar way plainly; but the shadows were gathering from minute to minute, and the piece of road which led from the gate of the park to the first houses of the village was deserted. Had she been less excited, Antonina might probably have felt frightened, for, in point of fact, she had never been out so late alone; but at this moment there was no room in her soul for anything but anger, the rebellious anger of a spirit which had never learnt to submit, and which, by nature as well as by habit, was peculiarly unable to bear even the semblance of control. As she walked rapidly, with her head held high and her teeth tightly closed, her pulses were still tingling with the irritation of the interview just past. Only vaguely she noticed that a fine rain had begun to fall, and once, in the semi-darkness, she stumbled over a cart-rut; but all this was of no consequence, so long as by her action she asserted her independ-

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ence, her perfect right to go where she pleased, and at what ever hour she pleased.

In less than ten minutes the schoolhouse was reached. A light burned already in its window, for here, among the houses, it was darker than in the open. Just outside the curtainless window Antonina stood still, arrested by a feeling of curiosity. Milnovics, with an open copy-book before him, whose contents he was supposed to be correcting, was sitting at the table. But he was not correcting the copy-book. With his chin upon his left hand and his elbow on the table, he sat quite still, gazing straight into the dull flame of the small petroleum-lamp before him. His eyes looked deep and dreamy, and his whole attitude was one of profound abstraction. There was something so pathetic about the youthful figure, with the rigid right arm and the ill-fitting coat, with the lines of energy about the mouth and the undercurrent of sadness in the black eyes, that Antonina felt her heart contract with the pain of an acute pity. The instinct of rebellion was as wide awake as ever, but a softer, warmer emotion was beginning to mingle with it.

She paused for only a few seconds, and then rapidly entered the schoolhouse.

At the sound of the opening door Milnovics started from his abstraction, and impatiently turned round. He did not immediately rise, for, owing

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partly to the dully burning lamp and partly to the peasant dress, he had not at once recognised the *Pani.*

"It is I," said Antonina breathlessly; "why are you looking so astonished?"

Milnovics rose with a look of confusion quite unusual to him.

"Pani Antonina! It is *you!* At this hour of the night, and alone? What has made you do this?"

Antonina put her hands over her ears.

"For heaven's sake, don't you begin also," she said, with a petulant laugh. "I have heard enough about the proprieties for to-day. I tell you that I had to come."

"You had to come! But what for?"

"Yes; I had to come, and it had to be this minute. I had to speak to you."

"You had to speak to me?" repeated Stepan, slowly, and as he spoke his face underwent a gradual transformation. An incredulous and yet joyful astonishment began to show itself, crossed by sharp spasms of doubt that were discernible in a momentary contracting of the pupils. The eyes lit up with hope, then darkened with an instinctive suspicion, and finally lit up again. The lines about the mouth relaxed. It was evident that, for the moment at least, hope had conquered.

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"What had you to speak to me about?" he asked, in a voice which betrayed that he had great difficulty in speaking calmly.

At the sight of his radiant eyes, Antonina hesitated for the first time.

"I was talking with my aunt, and she said something unkind about you, and it suddenly occurred to me that you might think my sentiments are the same as hers, that perhaps you have been thinking so all along. I couldn't have slept to-night with that thought, and as it was not quite dark yet, I thought I had better come and tell you this at once."

"Your aunt is welcome to say of me whatever she chooses," said Stepan, his face hardening again for one moment.

"It was nothing very bad," went on Antonina, tripping over her words in her eagerness. "Only that she is so completely a woman of the world, and views everything from a worldly point of view, and those sort of people are apt to be unmerciful—yes, unmerciful to any one in bad luck. But what I want you to believe is that I think quite differently. A person in misfortune seems to me to be a sort of martyr; to me he appears to have a dignity which puts him quite above the ordinary run of lucky men. You believe me, do you not?" Her eyes began to grow moist and her lips to quiver,

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as in a lower, more earnest tone she added, "And you believe that each time I see your stiff arm it hurts me as much as though I myself were suffering physically?"

Stepan looked intently into the eager child's face before him; there was a keen question in his eyes.

"I believe you," he said at length, drawing a deep breath. "And it was to tell me this that you came here to-day?"

"To tell you this, and——" she opened the tightly closed fingers of her right hand, and looked in surprise at the small hard object which she had unconsciously been grasping. "I do believe I came here also to bring you this box of pens," she said in a different tone, and feeling almost inclined to laugh through the very midst of the tears that were still glistening in her eyes, now that her mind was relieved of the weight which had pressed upon it. "At least, if I remember right, that is what I told my aunt."

In one instant the tension expressed on her features had given way to a look of almost roguish amusement.

"Poor Aunt Pawlina! What a fright I must have given her! I fancy she will not be in a hurry to meddle with me again. By the by, I ought to be looking after her, for I don't want to kill her quite,

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you know, and she has got regular *fin-de-siècle* nerves. I suppose I ought to be going."

"But it is impossible that you should go back alone," said Stepan, recovering himself with an effort from what had been one of the moments of strongest emotion in his life. "I will send a boy for the carriage."

"I don't want the carriage. Since I came alone, why can't I go back alone?"

"It is not to be thought of," said Stepan decisively. "If you will not have the carriage, then you must have an escort."

"That is absurd," Antonina was beginning, almost angrily, when suddenly another idea occurred to her.

"Let it be an escort, then," she corrected herself, "and you can be the escort."

Stepan looked again into her face quickly and keenly. For a moment he appeared to be hesitating.

"Perhaps it would be better not. Your aunt might not like me to accompany you."

"That is just why," burst out Antonina, in whom the mutinous child had again regained the upper hand. "You don't suppose, do you, that I am bound by the orders of my aunt? Oh, it will be too delicious to see her face! Or perhaps you do not *want* to accompany me?" she added, with

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a swift but significant change of tone, and one of those half-shy, half-coquettish glances with which all but the most frigid of young women begin at this age almost unconsciously to make experiments of their power.

Stepan thrilled beneath the look as though he had not been himself, but some emotional boy.

"You know that I am your servant," he said in a low tone.

"I do not want you for a servant, but for a knight," she replied gaily, almost joyfully, and, still smiling, gave him her hand.

At the moment that he raised it to his lips, it seemed to his excited nerves that there was a sound at the window. Antonina likewise must have heard it, for she too turned her head in that direction. The small square was quite dark, and apparently quite still; most probably it had been an illusion.

But it had been no illusion. The deserted village street was after all not quite deserted.

Owing to the extra work entailed by the arrival of the recruits, Radford had this afternoon reached the village a good deal later than usual. As he made his way along the muddy street, lighted only by the occasional glow of a hearth-fire, he almost regretted having come at all, for it was evidently closing in for a wet evening, and the late hour seemed to preclude every prospect but that of an

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hour's chat with Father Floryan. Somehow he did not feel particularly inclined for that chat. Should he not rather turn his horse's head and go back the way he had come without discovering himself? He was considering the question in his mind when from somewhere behind him, far down the silent village street, he heard a voice calling eagerly, "*Pan Lieutenant! Pan Lieutenant!*"

It was a woman's voice, but apparently quite unknown to him.

Reining in his horse, he turned in his saddle and peered into the darkness that by this time was almost complete. He could hear the footsteps of some one running, and presently a short, broad-shouldered figure detached itself from the shadows.

"Jusia, is that you?" he asked in astonishment, for by the mere outline of the figure he had immediately recognised Stepan's idiot sister.

"Come with me," panted Jusia, still quite out of breath; "there is something beautiful in the school. Come, I will show you. I have run, oh so fast! I saw you. Come quickly!"

Her full-cheeked face was radiant with some evidently strong delight, and in her usually drowsy eyes something like drunkenness shone. She did not seem to notice that the rain was beginning to fall fast upon her uncovered head.

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"But, Jusia, it is raining; I do not want to go to the school, I want to go home," said Radford, still in astonishment. It was only about the third or the fourth time that he had heard Jusia's voice, and each time it surprised him over again almost as much as though a person born dumb had begun suddenly to speak. He had never before seen her either so excited or so voluble as to-day.

"Come, come quick!" Jusia obstinately repeated. "Such beautiful beads like sugar, so big, and all colours. I want to have beads like that, sugar beads; you must bring Jusia beads like that. Poor Jusia has no beads at all!" and quite unexpectedly she broke into a long-drawn whimper.

"Very well, I will come with you," said Radford soothingly, well knowing that in her obstinate fits there was nothing for it but to humour her, and being afraid of risking an accident; for if he did not go of his own free will, she would probably attempt to pull the horse round. "Take me to the schoolhouse." And turning the chestnut's head, he followed Jusia, now running joyfully before him. As they approached the schoolhouse, she relaxed her pace; and having turned towards Radford, with her forefinger laid upon her broadly grinning mouth, almost slunk up to the window. Radford stopped at a few paces from the house, and, with-

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out having any idea of what he was to expect, bent down in the saddle and looked through the lighted window into the class-room within.

The petroleum-lamp was not burning very brightly, yet, compared to the darkness outside, the room looked almost brilliant, and every detail within showed with conspicuous distinctness. Antonina, in full peasant dress, her breast half-covered with brilliant blue and yellow glass beads, was standing opposite to Stepan. They were alone in the room, and she was smiling at him—all this Radford could see quite clearly. While he was still looking, Antonina put out her hand, and Stepan, his dark face full of emotion, raised it and pressed his lips upon it. This too Radford saw quite clearly, and in the instant that he saw it there sounded a groan in his ear. He started, and looked around him; Jusia was still grinning and tittering at the window, and no one else was visible in the street. Was it possible that that groan had been uttered by himself? But it had been most unmistakably a groan of pain, and what had he seen that could cause him pain? Stepan kissing Antonina's hand? But that was merely a Polish custom, it did not mean much more than an English handshake. And besides, he had seen that before, and it had not hurt him then; why then, in the name of common-sense, should it hurt him now? For the pain was there;

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yes, he felt it most plainly, like a sharp point in a fresh wound.

These thoughts and others darted through his mind during the few seconds that he sat there upright and rigid upon his horse, staring before him at the walls of the schoolhouse with horror-stricken eyes.

"You will bring big beads for Jusia?" said the voice of the imbecile girl beside him in a whisper.

He looked at her upturned face without becoming aware of who she was, then pulling his horse round, rode off rapidly down the street.

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CHAPTER XV.

The two days that followed on his return from Berenów were spent by Radford in a state of consternation bordering almost on stupefaction. Everything that for weeks past had been indistinctly puzzling him was now explained, fully and unmistakably. In the moment that he had seen Stepan kissing Antonina's hand he had known that he loved this woman, as certainly as though an angel with a trumpet had made him the announcement. And he knew also that he had loved her almost from the first. Those brown, shadowy eyes had wounded him, while he still believed himself cool enough to criticise what had begun by striking him as imperfections in the half-grown girl. He had not suspected the truth before, but it had been there all along, waiting only for the moment to break forth, like the ember hidden under the ashes, like the germinating seed just below the earth.

Yes, everything was explained; but out of this very explanation a darkness far darker than the

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one just cleared away threatened to arise. His carefully devised, assiduously cultivated plan seemed to him to be lying in a miserable heap on the ground. In the first alarm of his discovery he had lost his hold upon it.

After two days he began partially to recover from the mere feeling of consternation, and gradually to understand that everything was not yet lost. The plan and the possibility of carrying it out were still there, exactly the same as before; the only difference now was, that in order to carry it out he himself would have to be sacrificed.

When he had clearly grasped this point, his first instinctive sensation was not one of suffering but of an immense relief. His brow cleared, for the first time for two days. Yes, *this* might possibly be the end of self-reproach; *this* might suffice to satisfy that craving for atonement which had been his torment for so long. The more painful from a merely human point of view, the more satisfying would it be from a moral one. Yes, it was even better so than it had been before; probably nothing less than this would have finally pacified that small voice within him. And who could forbid him to sacrifice himself?

By this time he was pacing his room with a firm step and eyes that shone brightly. Already with a sort of rapture he had accepted the *rôle* which

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Fate seemed to be offering him. As yet he was suffering just as little as an Indian dervish suffers when in his fanatic ardour he runs nails into his flesh. The suffering would come later when his nerves began to settle down.

His duty seemed to him perfectly clear. Neither hesitation nor reflection was here wanted. The resolution to extirpate his love at any price had been instantly and instinctively taken. Any attempt to rob that other man of his happiness, as he had already robbed him of his career, seemed to him so contemptible beyond words that the thought could not at present take the form of a temptation. No doubt if Stepan had still been a soldier like himself, and with unimpaired limbs like himself, there could have been no reasonable objection to trying his strength against that of his comrade upon a fair field. But would Stepan under those circumstances have been so favoured as he now was? thus Radford's reflections led him on; was it not rather to his misfortune itself that he owed this great good fortune of being loved by Antonina? A conversation returned to his mind which he had had with her quite lately, and which greatly supported this theory.

The Deacon had been the original subject of discussion. Radford was accompanying Antonina from the schoolhouse to the *plebanija* when Bogu-

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mil Meczek, in a limp straw hat, had hastily slunk past them. There is something peculiarly depressing about a straw hat in November, and when the hat is battered and the face beneath it expressive of nothing but a passive dejection, the effect is greatly enhanced. Antonina returned his nervous salute with a quick little frown of displeasure. The Deacon was far too passive to be a favourite of hers.

"That man always acts on my nerves like an irritant," she remarked to Radford. "I suppose it is unkind of me to say so, but I cannot help it. Perhaps one ought rather to pity him, since he has had a good deal to suffer. There is something really pathetic about his position, when you come to think of it; but it is his attitude which spoils everything. How is it possible to feel real pity for a man who is so crushed by self-pity as to become absurd? To excite true pity a misfortune should be bravely borne."

"In the way, for instance, in which Lieutenant Milnovics bears his," Radford put in, espying an opportunity of the sort which he required.

"Yes," she agreed readily, "in that way. That is true courage. A manly, noble spirit. Lieutenant Milnovics does not want to make those around him suffer by the sight of his despair,—nor to increase the self-reproach of any one beside him,"

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she added as an afterthought, and with a quick glance into her companion's face.

Remembering this talk to-day, Radford could not doubt that pity had indeed been the root of this affection. But supposing that the cause for this pity had not been, would Stepan's personality alone have been sufficient to arouse Antonina's interest? Such speculations were idle, yet they could not fail to be interesting. And supposing, to go one step further—there could be no harm in taking a completely hypothetic case—supposing that he, Radford, had not been a sinner in Antonina's eyes, would he then also have compared as unfavourably with Stepan as he now evidently did? In what was Stepan so immensely superior to himself? He put the question not with any discontent, not even with jealousy, but only with a very natural curiosity. In intellectual gifts his comrade stood undoubtedly above him, as he had always freely admitted; but he could not help being aware that physical advantages were on his own side.

"She is too noble-minded to be taken by the mere shell, as the more common sort of women are," he decided within himself. "And she is right, too; yes, she is right to love Stepan. Those two are worthy of each other. Whatever I may suffer in the process, they must be brought together."

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It was in a state bordering on elation that he next went out to Berenów. The intoxication of his self-chosen martyrdom was still at work. Visions of himself blessing the newly-wedded couple, in a character that was a mixture of that of Best Man and Guardian Angel, floated before his mind's eye and agreeably flattered the childish element which still remained in his nature. He was anxious to test his own strength, to stretch himself on the rack which he knew was waiting for him over there, and to probe his own capacity for suffering. Instead of relaxing his efforts on Stepan's behalf he would redouble them—redouble them with his eyes now wide open to the truth, and revelling with a grim delight in the knowledge that he was working not only for the other's gain, but also for his own loss.

And, in point of fact, so long as the first glow of enthusiasm lasted, for exactly so long was the pain of the rack almost imperceptible. By degrees only, as week followed week, and the meetings with Antonina became more continual, did he grow aware that to sacrifice oneself does not necessarily mean to be at peace. A feeling that almost resembled rebellion would sometimes stir faintly within him. There could be no question as to what he was bound in honour to do under present circumstances, but why need exactly these circumstances

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have arisen? More and more frequently he now caught himself drawing mental comparisons between himself and his comrade, and once, almost to his consternation, he discovered that he was standing in front of his toilet-glass and approvingly scanning his own features. He was alone in the room, of course; but with his mind's eye he had seen a second set of features reflected beside his own, and he had acknowledged to himself that, if asked to decide between the two, few women would hesitate. But these were only passing moments of weakness, never actually yielded to.

Antonina's attitude towards himself had never quite ceased to be tinged with that hostility under whose influence their acquaintance had begun. She was never tired of throwing out passing remarks, which were to remind him that though he might be a pleasant enough companion for conversational purposes, it would not do to lose sight of the fact that he was also an evil-doer; but she no longer avoided him as she had done at first, and the discussions as to the nature and extent of his guilt, to which she was fond of returning, seemed to interest instead of irritating her. Whether she quite believed in his repentance or not, it was clearly evident that she had not yet utterly condemned the criminal, since she still found it worth while to work at his conversion.

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On one occasion fate was provoking enough to force her, probably against her will, to have recourse to this same criminal.

The incident occurred towards the end of November, when the cold was beginning to grow severe. Radford had put up his horse at the *plebanija*, and was on his way on foot to the schoolhouse, where he had been told that Stepan was still occupied. The dusk was falling fast, and the hard-frozen village street was empty of all sign of life. Suddenly, from round a corner, a woman's figure came flying towards him, and immediately behind her a second figure, that of a man, whose clumsy boots tramped heavily through the snow. There was no cry heard—nothing but the crackling of the hard snow and the heavy breathing both of the man and of the woman. She was running straight towards Radford, and, having reached his side, grasped blindly at his arm.

"Stand still, you dog!" shouted Radford at the man in his best Ruthenian, while instinctively putting his arm around the trembling and breathless figure beside him. "If you come one step nearer, you will have to give an account of yourself."

At sight of Radford, and more particularly of his uniform, the peasant had suddenly relaxed his pace. He now stood still and made an instinctive

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grab at his cap. Then, grumbling something between his teeth, he began slowly to move away.

"Is he gone yet?" asked an unsteady voice beside him.

Radford started, and abruptly withdrew his arm. In the slender figure draped in the scarlet petticoat and short yellow sheepskin fur worn by the Ruthenian peasant women at this season he had believed himself to be supporting one of the village maidens; but those words had not been spoken in Ruthenian, and the sound of the voice was unmistakable.

"Pani Antonina," he almost stammered, "is that you?"

Instead of replying to his question, she raised her head and looked at him with affrighted eyes.

"And is that you?" she asked in her turn. "I had not even recognised you; I suppose I was too frightened."

"Yes, it is I," answered Radford, who had detected or imagined that he detected symptoms of disappointment in the sound of her voice. "It is I," he added, with unusual bitterness, "not Lieutenant Milnovics."

Antonina looked at him wonderingly, evidently astonished by his tone.

"Even a murderer can come in usefully at mo-

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ments," some irresistible impulse pushed him to add.

"A murderer?" she repeated, still in wonder.

"You told me, did you not, that in your eyes I was nearly a murderer?"

"Did I? I don't think I used quite so strong an expression. I think I said criminal."

"It is kind of you to make so great a concession," said Radford, astonished at his own sharpness, and yet not able to overcome the dark and bitter feeling within him. "And now, may I inquire whether you consider a criminal to be a safe escort? For I presume that you will prefer not to walk home alone?"

"Good gracious, no!" whispered Antonina, once more instinctively clutching at his arm. "Please do not leave me alone. You cannot imagine what a fright I have had. Is that wretch really gone? Do you know that he actually tried to—to *kiss* me? I suppose he thought I was a peasant, and he does not belong to Berenów either, or else of course he would have known me. I really don't know whether I shall ever have the courage to wear this dress again. Oh, it was horrible, I tell you, horrible,—and he smelt so odiously of *vôdki!*"

She shuddered and actually shook herself, in a sort of ecstacy of disgust.

"But you must promise me one thing," she

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went on in another tone—" nobody must know of this. My aunt would probably die of it, and I, too, would die of rage if there were jokes made about it; people are so stupid, you know. You will promise to keep this adventure secret, will you not?"

" Yes, I promise," said Radford, in a milder tone of voice, for the mere consciousness of sharing any sort of secret with her had about it a charm not to be resisted.

And the details of the adventure actually did remain secret, although the fact of Lieutenant Radford having accompanied the *Pani* from the village to the house could not be entirely hidden.

At his next meeting with Stepan, Radford was astonished to observe a heavy cloud upon his brow. Perhaps he might have overlooked the cloud had not Stepan himself drawn his attention to the cause.

" Is it actually true that you accompanied Pani Antonina home on Tuesday evening?" he had inquired of Radford, the very moment that they were left alone.

" Yes, it is true," replied Radford, astonished at something almost inimical in the tone of the question. The mere fact of Stepan so distinctly taking the initiative was in itself sufficiently astonishing.

" But it must have been almost dark," persisted Stepan, still in that tone of disturbance, which was

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so unlike his usual severely restrained mode of talking; "what put such a strange idea into your head as to walk home with her?"

"Of course it was almost dark; that was exactly why she could not possibly have walked home alone."

"Did she ask you to accompany her?"

"Yes; that is to say, I asked whether she would allow me to do so. What other choice had I, seeing that there was no other escort at hand?"

Stepan looked at his comrade fiercely, as though he were about to ask something more; but he put no other question, and said only, as he turned away abruptly, "There must be an end of this sort of thing; it is not right to let her be talked about in this way."

Radford was too entirely astonished to make any further remark. What could Stepan mean by this extraordinary irritation? What could mean that fierce question in his eyes, which had remained unspoken? The more he thought of that look—and it pursued him for days to come—the more puzzled did he grow. Could it—no; it surely could not mean that Stepan was jealous,—jealous of *him?* Could any one be so blind to his own good luck? It was scarcely conceivable. It remained possible of course that Stepan had guessed Radford's own secret, and that this instinctive feeling of enmity

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was the result. He must guard his secret better in future, and yet it was exactly now that the task was growing hard.

Hitherto the absolute suppression of his passion had been Radford's object, the first of the tasks he had set himself; but, after his meeting with Antonina in the dusk, he had conceded so far as to allow himself to believe that, so long as he continued loyally to work on his comrade's behalf, there could be no harm in allowing himself to love this same woman. Since he looked for no return and asked for no return, what wrong was he doing Stepan in this? It was not even as though he had any choice in the matter, for since the moment when she had leant against his arm, and he had felt her quick breath upon his cheek, he knew quite well that his passion would never be killed. Of course, by giving it rein, he would be incalculably increasing his own sufferings—but what of that? Had he not the right to torture himself, so long as it was only himself, to any extent he thought fit?

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CHAPTER XVI.

The long Polish winter had now set in in all its severity, and, as annually at this season, the village gradually assumed a look of desertion. The inhabitants, big and little, had disappeared behind their mud walls, and were busy either in doing nothing or in spinning flax, in an atmosphere calculated to stifle any one but a Ruthenian peasant; for the fissures of the small square windows had been carefully filled up with clay in autumn, and no one would dream of removing it before May at the earliest. Except to go to school or to church, or to the Jew who sold *vódki* (brandy) at the corner, or else to bring firewood from the forest, it rarely occurred to any one to cross the threshold of his winter prison—the result being that there were days and hours in which, but for the blue smoke which crept slowly through the straw thatching of the long rows of huts, Berenów might have been taken for a village of the dead.

At the *plebanija*, too, the season had brought the usual changes of habits. Madame Serpow read her

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newspapers more assiduously, and the Deacon tortured the ears of his relatives more frequently with his flute; while Father Floryan now wore a woollen handkerchief over his head instead of a silk one, and said Mass with a shawl under his vestment and a pair of felt slippers upon his feet. Except for Sunday Mass, the *Popa* rarely left his corner beside the big brick stove in the sitting-room, for it was Andrei's especial care to confine the number of unavoidable sick calls only to the most entirely unavoidable. This many-sided individual considered it as much his business to watch over the *Popa's* health as it was to economise in the matter of wax-candles and incense; and if a certain percentage of those who were buried at Berenów between November and April died without receiving the sacraments, it was not Father Floryan's fault, but entirely that of his sacristan, who, before allowing a summons to reach the *Popa*, never failed personally to convince himself that the patient was actually at his second-last gasp. Rather than risk a sore throat for Father Floryan, the conscientious and deeply religious Andrei cheerfully loaded his conscience with what he perfectly well knew to be a frightfully heavy responsibility.

It was in a miniature sledge, with room for no one but the driver and the passenger in one person, that Radford now undertook his visits to Berenów.

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The road there had become shorter than in summer, for the river which serpentined across the plain, and which the highroad made several corners to avoid, was now hard-frozen, and could securely be crossed. It was the first winter which he had passed in Galicia, and these solitary sledge-drives soon became his favourite entertainment. Of other amusements he had virtually none; for although the advent of the Carnival was felt even at Lohatyn in the shape of frequent social gatherings in the "dancing-room" of the "Black Eagle," and although, as a member of the regiment, it was impossible for him entirely to absent himself from these, yet he was aware of not feeling in the least entertained. With his back against the wall, he would stand for half an hour at a time dreamily scanning the crowd of dancers, always on the look-out for one face which he knew he would not find there; for, despite the entreaties of her aunt, Antonina had declined to take any part in the Carnival, which, however, did not prevent her displaying a species of scornful curiosity as to the details of such foolish things as balls. Radford soon perceived that, while avoiding putting direct questions, she yet seemed by no means sorry when her aunt fired off a set of inquiries as to the last dance at Lohatyn. Sometimes, when the Baroness was keeping the talk too exclusively confined to the subject of

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ruches and *volants*, Antonina, losing sight of her principles for a moment, would interrupt the very lame description of *toilettes*, which was all the chronicler could achieve, with some impatient question of her own.

"Never mind what they wore, but tell us what they *did*," she exclaimed on one of these occasions. "They always begin with a *Mazur*, don't they? I *do* love the music of a *Mazur*. Can you dance it, Lieutenant Radford?"

Radford replied that he had not yet learned the *Mazur* step.

"You should learn it, then; it is an intoxicating dance. It used to intoxicate me, even at my dancing-lessons."

"And yet you never go to balls?"

"That is a different thing," replied Antonina, evidently displeased. "I can dance my *Mazur* quite as well at home, to my aunt's accompaniment. And, by the by, tell me what sort of figures do they have at the *cotillon?*"

With the progress of the Carnival Radford's visits at the Berenów house became more frequent. Since Antonina liked to hear about the Lohatyn balls, why should she not have her wish? The winter was very long and very dull, and the subjects of conversation naturally scarce. At this season there was nothing to be done on the estate, and all

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the reforms at the school that lay within the *Pani's* power were already carried through, which accounted for the fact that the schoolhouse had lately figured less in her conversation than formerly. As for the unlucky peasant costume, it was never mentioned now. Ever since the adventure in the village street, it had been put aside in disgrace. It was a toy which had quickly lost its first gloss.

Although he could never hope to be more than a friend in this house, these frequent talks were to Radford a bitter pleasure. The running of sharp points into his own wound was an occupation exciting enough to support him. That Antonina should likewise incline to these talks appeared to him very natural. Stepan was anything but a conversationalist; however truly she might love him, she was yet too young and too lively not occasionally to require a change of society. The situation seemed to Radford to be very easy of explanation.

All the same, his reception was not invariably graeious. There were days when Antonina would be absolutely talkative, and others when, without any apparent cause, she had scarcely a word or a glance for him. Could this be mere caprice? There was no doubt that she had of late been even more capricious, more headstrong than usual. That hot

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hunger for work, that radiant love of it, seemed to have been dimmed by some cause known only to herself. She had long fits of sullen silence and quick movements of anger. It was evident that something either in her surroundings or in herself displeased her. This inequality of manner showed itself even towards Stepan, as Radford could not fail to observe. He had seen her distinguish him by marks of favour which he took to be unmistakable, and within the same hour conspicuously avoid him.

Having puzzled for long over the matter, Radford arrived at the following conclusion, which to some degree explained her changes of mood. It was always in her aunt's presence that Antonina showed herself ungracious towards him, and always in her absence that she became her natural and friendly self. That the Baroness would have been charmed to see him come forward as a suitor for Antonina's hand had from the first been as patent to Radford as it was clear to him that Stepan's candidature was in this quarter thoroughly disapproved of. Was it not possible that Antonina's innate spirit of contradiction was here at work? That would mean, therefore, that her occasional coldness towards him need not be taken at its apparent value. And her occasional warmth towards Stepan—was it possible that the same rule might

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rightly be applied to it? Radford preferred to pursue the thought no further, but rather turned from it as from something vaguely disturbing.

As the winter advanced he began to tell himself that surely it was time for the crisis to be reached. There were moments at which the so much wished for and so much dreaded event appeared to him to be imminent. On leaving Berenów he would tell himself that on his next visit there the engagement of Antonina and Stepan could not fail to be proclaimed, and when he next approached the village in his sledge the mere sight of any member of the Milnovics family, even from afar, would cause his heart to beat violently in expectation of the news which he had steeled himself to listen to. Sometimes, when these continual false alarms grew insupportable, Radford would stay away from Berenów for a week or ten days, persuaded that on his next coming there everything would be over. But when he came again nothing was over yet, and the only result of the sacrifice he had made was a reproachful question of Baroness Mielecka as to why he had stayed away so long?

What was it that made this stage drag so terribly? he impatiently asked himself. Could it be that Stepan had missed some favourable moment? It would be much easier to take his position finally when those two were irrevocably betrothed. This

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delay was no mercy, but only an unnecessary torment.

It was at this stage of the development of affairs that, to his consternation, he discovered that his visits to the *plebanija* were beginning to lose their interest in his eyes. Quite suddenly it occurred to him that for weeks past he had forgotten to supply Madame Serpow with even the smallest British delicacy, and was there not a parcel of Turkish tobacco for the *Popa* lying somewhere in his lodging? With a qualm of remorse he remembered that it was a long time since he had seen Father Floryan with his *chibouk* in his hand.

But these discoveries were not all. More than once, when leaving the Berenów house, he was sorely distressed on realising that during the whole of his visit Stepan's name had not once been mentioned. Could this be called working in his comrade's interest? Next time he would arrive still penitent, and seize the first opportunity, whether appropriate or not, for dragging in some mention —laudatory of course—of Milnovics.

On one of these occasions he overdid his part so completely that Antonina lost patience.

"I do wish you would talk of something else!" she exclaimed sharply, with one of those swift changes of complexion which in her were so common. "Why *will* you always keep ringing Lieu-

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tenant Milnovics's virtues in my ears? Don't you think I am able to discover them for myself?"

Radford turned pale, while stammering some incoherent excuse.

"It must have been my awkwardness," he accused himself in thought. "It can only have been my awkwardness which provoked her to speak so."

Nevertheless the idea that Antonina did possibly, after all, not love Stepan, had from that moment forward, though unknown to himself, begun to take root within him. But it was not until some weeks later that he became conscious of his own thought, while at the same time seeing it supported by what looked like direct evidence.

On a wild stormy day in February—one of those days that bring it home to the mind that, though snow and ice still reign supreme, winter will not last for ever—Radford found Antonina alone in the drawing-room, evidently just returned from some excursion, for her boots still showed marks of fresh snow, while her hat and gloves had been flung on the table beside her. She had pressed herself into one corner of the sofa, against whose back her face was hidden.

"Has anything happened?" asked Radford in some alarm, for as she turned round at his entrance he saw that her expression was highly disturbed, and even that there were tears in her eyes.

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"A great deal has happened," replied Antonina, in a voice which shook with agitation. "You know, don't you, that this is the day fixed for the first examinations in the agricultural class?"

"I don't think I knew that. Well, and have they not taken place?"

"They *have* taken place," said Antonina between her teeth; "but I almost wish they hadn't! It has been the bitterest day in my life."

Then as Radford, taken aback by her vehemence, stood there, looking at her inquiringly and yet not venturing to frame a direct question, she went on talking breathlessly—

"It was simply too absurd; I don't think I shall be able to get over it. I am rather glad you have come, it is a relief to be able to talk about it to somebody. Just listen! It was Lieutenant Milnovics who was examining, of course: I was only supposed to be attending; but he was taking such a terrible time over the hay-stacks and the barns, so I thought I would hurry up matters by putting in a question of my own. I asked a small boy on the first bench which was preferable for cattle, hemp or flax? But he only seemed to be petrified by my question. Then, in the middle of a dead silence in the class-room, and while I caught sight of rows of open mouths, and was beginning to

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wonder whether I had made any mistake, another boy on the last bench stood up and said, with the most offensive grin I have ever seen, 'He can't tell you that, *Pani*, because his father's cow doesn't wear a shirt.' And then the grin spread all round the school, and I remembered with a sort of jerk that hemp and flax is the stuff you make linen of. I didn't wait for the end of the examination, but left the school with as much dignity as I could, and now probably they are all giggling together over it, the wretches! Just as if I could be expected to keep all these things properly labelled in my head. The story will go the round of the village, perhaps of the country-side. Isn't it cruel? Please tell me that you sympathise with me. If you are going to laugh too, I shall hate you as much as I hate that boy."

But Radford was not in the least inclined to laugh. While she was telling her tale, Antonina, too agitated to sit still, had risen from the sofa, and was walking quickly to and fro upon the polished floor. In passing she snatched one of her gloves from the table, and seemed to find a certain relief to her irritation in twisting it backwards and forwards between her fingers. Radford heard what she was saying, without taking any especial interest in it, for his attention was absorbed in watching Antonina herself. For the first time it occurred

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to him that she had changed a good deal, physically, during the half-year which had passed since he saw her first. Meeting her as frequently as he had done, he had overlooked the small stages by which the immature girl was gradually approaching the perfect development of womanhood. To-day some combination of circumstances, too subtle to be realised, caused him all at once to catch sight of the great step which had been made. There was still some work left for Nature to do: the gestures were almost childish in their abruptness, but the glance was maturer and deeper; the angular line of the shoulders, which had disturbed him at first sight, had now melted into a softer curve; and the black eyebrows had lost their too great conspicuousness by harmonising perfectly with the more fully developed features.

Yes, she was growing beautiful, Radford said within himself, more beautiful every day—but not for him. His eyes followed her with a yearning gaze; and when at her last words she stood still before him, with lips that quivered with mortification and eyes that were bright with tears of rage, there came over him so terrible a moment of weakness that he was forced hastily to look away, for fear of her reading his secret in his eyes.

It took some seconds before he could regain his outward composure.

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"Do you sympathise or not?" inquired Antonina imperiously, surprised by his silence.

"Of course I sympathise," he murmured, still with lowered eyes.

Fortunately Antonina was too much taken up with the subject in hand to notice his agitation.

"This sort of thing could not happen," she went on, while resuming her walk about the room, "if the class was properly conducted. Just imagine the impertinence of that child! I will tell you in confidence—quite in confidence—that I do not think Lieutenant Milnovics has got the right way of managing the scholars. In some ways he is too hard with them, and in others he allows them too much licence. What happened to-day is really his fault."

Radford said nothing, but there came a vivid gleam into his downcast eyes. The joy of hearing his rival spoken of thus was so great that he was forced to close his lips more tightly for fear of smiling.

"I think I shall give up the agricultural class," he heard Antonina's voice saying; "the people here are not enough enlightened for it, and there will be plenty of other things for me to do on the estate."

"Yes, there is always work enough on the estate," said Radford, finding his voice again. He felt suddenly light-hearted, like one from whose shoul-

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ders some pressing weight has been lifted. The idea that perhaps Antonina did not love Stepan had now taken full possession of him. Why, he now questioned himself, had he taken the existence of this love for granted? Supposing that, after all, pity had just remained pity, and nothing more, and that the desire to provoke her aunt had done the rest in shaping her actions? In that case his theory was undermined.

And this new feeling of light-heartedness, he soon began to take himself to task, was there any sense in it? What reason had he for feeling glad, since this discovery, or quasi-discovery, meant only that the work which he had sworn to do, instead of approaching completion, was still to be done from the very beginning? In what was his duty altered? "In nothing," he replied within himself, still sincerely unaware of the crisis which had been slowly approaching all winter, and towards which every chance occurrence seemed to be pushing him without any choice of his own.

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CHAPTER XVII.

It was not many weeks after the conversation last recorded that there occurred another incident, seemingly trivial, but which later on proved its importance in the chain of small but irresistible daily events which was drawing him on.

It happened about the middle of March, on a day which, looked at superficially, still appeared to be a winter's day, but on which, nevertheless, the ice-king was lying at his last gasp. Radford, who had started for Berenów in his sledge, spent most of the journey in regretting that he had not gone on horseback instead. He had struck into the usual track which he had followed all winter, and it was not until he was straight opposite the village that it occurred to him to wonder whether the ice on the river would still bear him. Just as he was putting this question to himself he came in sight of the river, and immediately perceived that a small crowd was collected on the opposite bank, while, at about the middle of the stream, a

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cart laden with two huge logs was stuck fast, at an angle which showed that the ice was giving way. It was an incident familiar to the inhabitants of Berenów, for the short cut across the river was too convenient to be abandoned without positive necessity. The collapse of the first cart was the signal invariably waited for. But despite their familiarity, an element of panic always accompanied these accidents—for, once roused from his usual apathy, the Ruthenian peasant has a fatal propensity for losing his head—like the drivers of the cart at present in question, who, instead of fetching ropes, were saying their prayers aloud. A few of the more energetic of the helpers tugged ineffectually at the embedded wheel, while others lashed mercilessly at the jaded horses, whose feet slipped on the ice, and whose poor, meagre knees shook while they strained in vain at their rope-harness; but the very number of the rescuers only made the situation more precarious, for the ice, unable to bear the surcharge of weight, was giving way in all directions. Advice and encouragement, generally unintelligible, were being liberally shouted from all sides. Foremost among the group of spectators on the opposite bank Radford caught sight of the figure of Antonina. The Milnovics family was likewise there assembled, with the exception of Stepan, who stood in mid-stream beside the foundered cart, up to his

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knees in water, and endeavouring to induce the bewildered peasants to follow his directions.

As soon as he understood what was going on, Radford did what seemed to him the only natural thing—that is to say, he left his sledge on the bank, and began to cross the ice, walking more cautiously as he approached the cart. He was only a few paces off when, with the report of a gunshot, another piece of ice gave way, and Stepan, impatiently pushing aside one of the men, made an attempt with his left arm to move the wheel.

"Don't do that, Stepan," said Radford, reaching his side at the same moment. "It is impossible to lift this weight with one arm alone; you will hurt yourself. Let me see if I can do it."

He bent down and clasped his two hands together under one of the spokes of the wheel; then, setting his teeth, with one supreme effort he succeeded in lifting the sinking wheel so far that the men dragging at the horses' heads could free the cart from the broken ice, and gain less dangerous ground.

There was a shout on the bank, and a murmur near at hand. Radford, still breathless from his exertion, had to defend himself from half-a-dozen peasants who seemed determined to kiss his hand, then and there, in the middle of the river. On the

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faces turned towards him there was a look that resembled awe.

Something of this same look was discernible on the countenance of the *Popa*, as well as of his sister and daughter, when Radford at length reached the opposite bank, and it was with shining eyes that Antonina received him.

"You have not hurt yourself?" were her first words. "I really never knew that you were so strong."

Radford laughed awkwardly, ashamed of the glow of satisfaction which he felt at her words.

"It is only a question of muscles," he answered conscientiously; "and British muscles, you know, generally have the advantage over foreign ones. Those fellows are underfed, and I am not; that is all."

Then, by way of punishing himself for that glow of satisfaction, which would not let itself be quite suppressed, he added deliberately—

"If Milnovics had had his right arm, he would have done it too."

"I don't know whether Lieutenant Milnovics, even with his right arm, would be quite as strong as that," said Antonina doubtfully.

Though he did not see it, would not see it, and scarcely even suspected it, he was very near now to what was to be the chief crisis of his life, so near,

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indeed, that it wanted but the chance of a word or a look to open his eyes to his danger.

When several more weeks had passed without bringing this chance word, it came at last upon a sunshiny day of early May, and in the incalculable shape in which such chances always do present themselves.

The circumstances, in themselves, were simple enough. An officer in Radford's regiment had recently been killed by a fall from his horse, and, as was natural in a small neighbourhood, the interest of the sad event had spread beyond military circles. It was Radford who had first spoken of the incident at Berenów, and he had likewise mentioned that this was the second man who had been sacrificed to the vicious temper of this brute, who, although a splendid thoroughbred, was known to be a dangerous rearer.

When next he came out to Berenów, he appeared to have shaken off the depression of the event.

"I have made a famous acquisition," he announced to Antonina. "My stables have doubled in value since the beginning of the week. Do you remember my telling you about poor Konitzki's brown mare? Well, I bought her yesterday."

"Do you mean the horse that killed him?" asked Antonina quickly.

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"Yes. But I flatter myself that she won't manage to kill me."

"And didn't you say that her former possessor had also been killed?"

"So he was; but that may have been a mere chance. You can break your neck falling off a bench, you know, if you're unlucky."

"I must say I think it is an absurd piece of *bravoure* to buy a beast with a reputation of that sort," said Antonina, with her chin in the air, and symptoms of strong displeasure on her face.

"I didn't mean it as *bravoure*," replied Radford humbly. "I really was on the look-out for a horse, and this chance was too good to let pass."

"Do as you like," said Antonina, somewhat irritably; "of course it is no business of mine."

The horse was not spoken of any more that day; but at his next visit Antonina accosted him with the question as to whether he had yet tried his new purchase.

"Yes; we have had our first difference of opinion," replied Radford; "it was a question of a choice of two roads, but I am glad to say that I bore off the palm."

Antonina shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"Surely it would be wiser of you to sell this beast and buy a safer animal," she remarked, speaking in the somewhat brusque tone of voice into

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which she usually slipped when in any degree excited. "I don't think it is quite fair towards your parents to go in for these sorts of risks." Then, meeting Radford's astonished gaze, she added immediately, "But let's talk of something else, by all means. I am dead sick of that horse."

And Radford talked of other things in perfect good faith, a little surprised at her persistency on this one point, but not yet understanding what was so close at hand.

When next he came out to Berenów, even the memory of winter was gone, and the May sunshine was pouring as radiantly upon the straw-thatched roofs as it had done on the day of his first entry here, just a year ago. To-day, as then, the birch and willow branches which mark the "green festival" were making the village gay, and, as on that day, the apple and cherry trees took the excuse of each breath of air to snow their blossoms upon the horseman.

Antonina was in the garden to-day, busy on one of the walks, with a rake in her hands. They were sadly in want of raking, these poor deserted walks, which for so long had been untrodden, and in whose more distant nooks the leaves of summers past lay drifted as thickly as in any woodland dell. It was on one of these neglected spots, where hawthorn and bramble bushes, growing in great un-

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checked tangles, had usurped the place of more cultivated shrubs, that Radford found Antonina, standing ankle-deep in half-decayed leaves, and vigorously at work upon the moist brown heaps which all winter long had peacefully slept under their counterpane of snow. Such occupations were even more congenial to her than the organisation of agricultural classes, for her bodily vigour required an outlet quite as much as did her mental activity.

She was standing bare-headed and bare-handed, for her hat-brim had proved itself to be inconveniently wide, and her gloves prevented her getting a proper grasp of the rake. Her hair, passing from light into shadow, and from shadow back into light, seemed at moments to be intensely black, while at other moments the thick coils caught a warm brown reflection along their edges.

"You are not going to give a garden-party, are you?" asked Radford, when the first greetings were over. "This looks terribly like it. Are all the paths to be put into such wonderful order?"

"No, I am not going to give a garden-party," said Antonina, without looking at her visitor; "but I am going to do something else. Can you guess what it is?"

She spoke with a touch of nervousness in her manner which with her was quite unusual, and, though she had returned to the raking of the leaves,

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her attention was evidently no longer fixed on her occupation.

"It is always impossible to guess what you will do next," said Radford, in a tone of conviction.

"I am going to buy a horse."

"A horse! What for?"

"Yes; a horse," she repeated, with a certain obstinate emphasis. "Is there any reason why I should not buy a horse?" and she glanced up with defiance in her eyes.

"I suppose not," said Radford. "And have you found a horse to suit you?"

"Yes, I have. I have found a horse to suit me perfectly."

"And where is the beast at this moment? I think you had better let me have a look at it first, before you close the bargain."

"At this moment it is at Lohatyn, and you don't need to take a look at it because you know it already. It is your horse I want to buy, Lieutenant Radford."

"My horse! Satanella? But, Pani Antonina, I am not thinking of selling her!"

"You can begin to think of it now, can't you?" said Antonina, with a laugh that was as nervous as her voice had been, and as little like herself. "You surely couldn't be so unchivalrous as to refuse me a favour, and I have fallen in love with

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Satanella, I really have. On Tuesday I was in Lohatyn with my aunt, and I saw her. She is just lovely, and, in short, I feel that I must have her. You *will* sell her to me, won't you?"

"Were you in Lohatyn on Tuesday?" said Radford, following another train of thought. "How could I miss seeing you? Ah, I remember, I was out with the squadron; but so was Satanella, so how could you have seen her?"

"Well, perhaps it was Monday or Wednesday, never mind which. But say only that you will sell me that horse?"

"But, Pani Antonina, you couldn't possibly ride her."

"I never said that I meant to ride her."

"And as for putting her in harness, you would be far safer with a couple of fiery dragons to draw your carriage."

"I don't mean to put her in harness," said Antonina, working her rake more and more rapidly, although there was not a single leaf left on that particular spot. "I do wish you were not so inquisitorial! What can it matter what I want the horse for? I want it; isn't that enough?"

"I should like to understand," remarked Radford doubtfully. "It is rather a responsibility to sell a horse with that sort of temper, and really I cannot see what you could do with her."

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"I shall shoot her if I choose!" said Antonina, suddenly putting up her head. "I would much rather shoot her than that you—I mean that anybody should ever ride her again."

Radford's eyes happened to be fixed on her ungloved hands while she spoke, and, to his astonishment, he saw that they were trembling. While he was still wondering what this meant, her last words struck upon his ear, and at the same moment the rake slipped from her fingers to the ground. As she stooped to pick it up he saw that her cheek was burning, while with her left hand she made an impatient movement, as though to brush away something which might have been an importunate midge trying to settle on her lashes.

Suddenly, without preparation or warning, the hawthorn and bramble bushes seemed to Radford to have joined hands and to be whirling round and round him in a giddily reeling circle. It was something of the same sensation he had felt when the tile had fallen upon his ten-year-old head, mingled with the consternation which had followed upon the duel.

"I don't think I can stay much longer to-day," he succeeded in saying, quite intelligibly. "And besides I haven't paid my respects to your aunt."

And without waiting for an answer, he turned and left her, knowing only that he must get away

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at any price, and taking care as he walked to keep well in the middle of the path, after the manner of a man who is just sober enough not to wish to appear drunk.

It had taken a long time, but at last he understood.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

Radford's homeward ride on that day had about it some of the characteristics of that species of merciful delirium which for a short space of time kills pain. Even the glare of the May sunshine upon the road, and even the cherry blossoms which floated downwards to die in the dust, seemed to be part of a happy dream.

"She loves me,—she loves me!" the newly returned swallows were twittering to each other, as an echo to his own thoughts.

"And I love her!" a beetle hummed into his ear as it skimmed past.

"We love each other!" a crooked old apple-tree seemed to be summing up the matter, while nodding its misshapen head at the rider.

But spells of delirium generally are brief, and even the most unimaginative amongst us are intensely dependent upon our surroundings. So long as he was among the flowers and the fields Radford continued blissfully to dream: from the moment that he found himself in the sordid streets

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of Lohatyn, with the well-known prosaic details of everyday life about him, the perfection of the dream began to grow disturbed. The sight of fresh grass and of birds on the wing had caused him to fall from one trance into another, but the very first Jew whose tattered *kaftan* caught his eye, and even the scent of garlic wafted towards him, made him feel uneasily conscious that somewhere in the background of his trance, and casting a cold shadow across its radiancy, there stood a dark figure, indistinct as yet, but ever present, and ever growing a little more palpable. As yet he did not want to look that way: he wanted only to revel in his newly discovered happiness, and to examine this shadow more closely might mean a danger to his happiness; so much he already understood.

"Who would have thought it! Who would have thought it!" he kept repeating to himself when in the solitude of his own room. "How blind I must have been! O Antonina! Antonina! what will our next meeting bring?"

He had begun by flinging himself on a chair, but had immediately sprung up again, and was moving restlessly about the room, not pacing it regularly, but continually changing his direction, and standing still after every few steps.

"Does she love me already, love me consciously? I do not know; but she cannot help coming

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to do so,—I saw that in her eyes to-day. It will want but my own declaration to reveal her heart to herself. I must take the earliest opportunity of speaking, in justice to her I must do so, for is it not possible that she knows that she has betrayed herself, and is waiting for me to speak? Yes," he said aloud, as though to convince himself by the sound of his own words, "I shall go there to-morrow and tell her the whole truth, and meanwhile I shall drink her health."

Quite abruptly he took his cap from the wall, and left his lodging, humming a waltz-tune, a thing which was not generally a habit of his. He did not stop to ask himself why he was so glad to run against a comrade, two steps from the door, nor why he was so inventive in excuses for prolonging the after-supper chat with which the evening was generally wound up. He was not yet calm enough to understand that he was afraid of his lonely room, afraid of the long night hours before him, and of that which he knew they must infallibly bring.

Having reached his lodging again and struck a light, he sat down on the nearest chair. There was something of a surrender in the movement. He had drunk more than any of his comrades; but the wine had not gone to his head, as he had calculated that it would do, and, failing this hope, it had come over him that there was no more escape for him.

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That shadow would not be thrust aside, must be looked at in the face, that doubt or scruple, whichever it was, which was pressing upon him would not be ignored, but must be weighed and analysed and overcome—if it was to be overcome.

He began by looking at the immovable shadow; inquiringly and defiantly he looked. Little by little it disclosed its features; and, yes, they were the features of Stepan, as he had known all along that they were, just as he had known that he was not happy, even while pretending to hug his joy to his heart, and that he would not declare his love to Antonina on the morrow, though settling in his mind the very hour at which he meant to start for Berenów. He had been playing a comedy with himself all evening, and even at this moment of desperate surrender there was a certain relief in throwing off the mask. This was the moment at which the real struggle began.

It was unavoidable that this second crisis of the soul should be incomparably more violent, incomparably harder to bring to an issue, than had been the first. If he had been called upon to renounce anything then, it had been to renounce a chance, while now he held in his hand the very thing, or at least the certainty of attaining it, and it was expected of him that he should cast it aside. It did not at first seem possible that he should do it. Who

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even expected it of him? Could any living man, whatever his wrongs, be empowered to demand of him this unbearable sacrifice? According to the voice of Nature and to all human traditions he had a right to his happiness—could even that shadow with the features of Stepan forbid him to be happy?

"And I have done no wrong," said Radford to himself; "I did not look for this happiness—it came to me. I have not been false to *him*. It is enough, I have done enough. God must do the rest. Why should I fling away the treasure that has been given to me? I, too, am a man—I, too, want my share of joy in this world."

Even while he said it he covered his face with his hands. Why was it that his own words would not convince himself? Was it because in his heart of hearts he knew that there are other voices besides that of Nature, other traditions beyond those that are purely human? His happiness was being offered him, but at the price of another's misery, and that other the man to whom he owed the sacred duty of atonement. Even supposing that for Stepan there never could be any chance, had he the right to be happy, so long as his comrade was unhappy?

But supposing that Stepan did not love her? The thought had slunk into his mind, rather than flashed across it, and in his despair he grasped at

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it as though at a forlorn-hope. What a deliverance that would be! But it was only the respite of a minute. The next already he had let go his hold of the thought. His nature was too truthful to allow itself to be thus barefacedly duped. He knew quite well that Stepan loved Antonina: by the other's voice, by his eyes, he knew it, by his own sufferings, and by the fellow-feeling which such suffering engenders. To take refuge behind this make-believe screen would be an act of cowardice of which he felt himself incapable. The truth, such as it was, must be reckoned with.

It was a reckoning which could not be closed in an hour. Two o'clock struck, and Radford still sat on the same spot, and not even the heat of the battle had diminished. At moments it seemed to him that had any other man's happiness been in question, he could have wrecked it with a light heart; but not this one's—no, not this one's. Did that then mean that he was going to renounce her? And he felt his forehead growing cold as he put to himself the question.

Again there came intervals when self-reproach would take the upper hand. At these times he even lost sight of his own innocence. His conduct for months past struck him as unjustifiable; his supposed zeal for Stepan's cause as one long chain of hypocrisy.

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"It is not true that I did not seek my happiness," he told himself; "it is for myself I have been working all winter, not for Stepan, and Stepan knows it."

Only now it occurred to him that for months past his comrade had been almost imperceptibly drawing back from him. He was not aware of noticing this at the moment, for latterly he had in a sort of way lost sight of Stepan, as of many other things as well; but the impression had nevertheless been there, and wanted only the right light to be turned upon it. It was evident that Stepan had understood what was coming long before he had understood it himself. Stepan had understood and mistrusted, probably despised him.

"And he has every right to despise me," groaned Radford. "O my God! what a failure I have been! How much I meant to do, and how little I have done!"

And, overpowered by an acute sense of disappointment, the worn-out watcher laid his arms upon the table, and, with his head upon them, burst into the first tears he had shed since childhood. At this moment he had not yet formulated any distinct resolution; but he knew already, and had known for some minutes past, how the struggle was going to end. It was his happiness that he was weeping for, quite as much as for his failure.

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When, after barely an hour's sleep, Radford awoke in broad daylight, he was conscious only of a deep exhaustion, which was almost as much physical as mental. The battle was over, and he had conquered; but his mood was subdued rather than triumphant, for this sort of victory drains the strength of the victor. The boyish enthusiasm which had supported him six months ago did not come to his aid to-day. No flattering pictures arose to make the idea of martyrdom alluring. The serene spirit of self-sacrifice was gone; it was in a hard, sober mood that he had made up his mind to do that which he believed to be his duty, and which he believed that he would be able to do.

Did there still remain a chance for Stepan, or did there not? This was the first point to be considered. Was it not possible, just barely possible, that this inclining of Antonina towards himself might be no more than a fancy, one of the many fancies in which this spoilt child was always indulging, and which, missing encouragement, might well die a natural death? It was a possibility, and upon this possibility he resolved once more to take up his task.

"He is so immeasurably my superior in so many ways," he told himself, with bitter satisfaction, "so much more gifted intellectually; and then, see how noble-minded, how forgiving, he has been towards

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me! No, it is impossible that she should not get to love him in time; but she must first understand that I mean to be nothing but a friend."

To make this clear would be both difficult and delicate, yet Radford did not despair of success. Should he see the danger for himself increasing, there was still one means of killing his own hopes. He had only got to tell Antonina the whole truth with regard to the duel, and, by thus stirring her indignation to its depths, cut himself off definitively from her, possibly even lose her regard. It would be bitter; he hoped he would not have to do it, but should the necessity arise he must not hesitate.

He waited a few days longer, in order to steady himself, and then went out to Berenów. There should be no outward difference in his conduct, he told himself, no interruption in his visits, nothing which could betray that that last meeting had in any way been an epoch. This visit was to be a trial of his own strength, and was to give him a clue as to what possibilities the future still held.

"I think I can do it," he told himself, as at a footpace he rode along between the double row of ancient poplars, whose nakedness not even the month of May had been able completely to cloak, and on whose shabby crowns the crows had built their nests. "Yes; I think I can do it."

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But even the sight of the house-door appearing in perspective at the end of the avenue set his heart beating against his ribs.

"I can do it, if only I do not find her alone like last time."

The ladies were in the park, he was told at the door.

"The ladies!" That meant that her aunt was with her.

He had not very far to go before finding the Baroness, sitting in an attitude of great discomfort upon a very low and very massive stone bench, and with her skirts carefully gathered up from possible contact with the gravel.

"I have begged Antusia to order basket-chairs," she explained to Radford in the same breath with her greeting. "These things are simply ruin to one's clothes. If one *has* to sit out of doors, basket-chairs at least help to diminish the suffering."

Radford drew a breath of relief. A glance cast furtively around him had shown him that Antonina was nowhere within sight. He was thanking heaven for this respite, which would give him time to steady his nerves, but the Baroness was too quick for him.

"You are wondering where Antusia is," she remarked benevolently. "It is terrible to have to

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confess it, but she has gone off bird-nesting at the other side of the park. Those old habits of hers are much more difficult to eradicate than any sort of weeds." And the Baroness sighed despondently. Then her face lighted up with the reflection of some new idea.

"You have come most opportunely, Lieutenant Radford; *would* it be asking too much of you to go after her and bring her back? She must have ransacked dozens of nests by this time, and I am sure she is tearing her frock to tatters upon those dreadful thorns."

"But I do not know where to look for her," said Radford, with a curious sensation of alarm. "This park is so huge, I should probably only lose my way and not find Pani Antonina."

"Oh no, you will not lose your way," smilingly persisted the Baroness. "She went off over there to the right. I cannot possibly go myself, because those walks would be the ruin of my shoes."

"Had I not better tell one of the servants to look for her? They know their way about."

"No, no, no; the servants are all busy. You will oblige me greatly by going. I daresay she is not far off, and I shall wait for you here."

Radford turned without another word and went off in the direction indicated. Evidently he was going to be let off nothing.

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The path he was following was the same he had followed on his last visit, and would in time lead him to the spot on which he had seen her last. She would be there again to-day, he told himself, among the hawthorn and bramble blossoms, waiting for him to come to speak.

He moved along slowly, almost reluctantly. These distant paths were occasionally obstructed by some mighty tree-branch lying across the passage, while ever and again he had to make his way through the untrimmed lilac and syringa bushes, whose perfumed boughs, still wet with morning dew, brushed his neck and ears. At another time these obstacles would have irritated him, to-day he was glad of them, since they gave him an excuse for lingering. Was it not possible that he might yet miss her, and, after all, escape the dreaded *tête-à-tête?*

Now and then he stood still and listened intently. But no sound betrayed her presence. There was nothing to be heard but a continual chirping and twittering close at hand, and in the distance the cuckoo screaming from the hills. Sometimes a woodpecker's beak tapped against a tree stem, and sometimes a bird flew up so close to him as to touch his sleeve.

The spot where Antonina had been raking leaves last time was deserted to-day. Radford

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walked on a little faster. On other spots he looked for her, in shady nooks where the brackens were beginning to uncurl their brown rings, and on open places on which the spring flowers stood as thick as the grass. But she was on none of these. Quite half an hour had passed before he emerged by the side of a sheet of water, on which, in former days, swans had sailed, and an ornamental boat been tethered, but now likewise fallen into neglect. The remains of the boat were indeed still rotting by the water's edge; but the swans had long since fallen a prey to foxes, and slimy duckweed disfigured the face of the little lake.

Suddenly, by the side of the water, Radford caught sight of Antonina standing with her back against a tree-stem, and her arms folded across her breast. Her head was somewhat bent, and her eyes were fixed upon a newly sprouting fern which with the point of her foot she was idly stirring. The passive attitude was so unlike anything he had ever seen in her that Radford instinctively stood still, feeling almost as though he had no right to obtrude himself upon her in this moment of abstraction. And as he looked his courage faltered a little. His task was going to be more difficult than he had supposed.

The next moment a twig snapped beside him, and she looked up. Perceiving him, she coloured

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vividly, and then, quickly stooping, gathered the fern at her feet.

"We have lovely ferns here, have we not?" she said, not waiting for him to speak, and with only one swift, sharp glance of inquiry into his face.

"Yes, lovely ferns," agreed Radford, summoning his resolutions to his aid. "Your aunt sent me to look for you," he added immediately. "I think she is growing anxious at your absence."

Antonina looked at him again with keen eyes.

"Ah, yes, I daresay," she said quickly, and in a tone which might have meant either relief or disappointment.

"I must have done it very well," said Radford to himself. "When she looked at me the first time she was asking whether she had betrayed herself the other day, and now she believes that she has not."

"Baroness Mielecka is rather anxious about your tearing your dress," he remarked aloud. "By the by, I suppose you have found a great many birds' nests by this time?"

"Not many," said Antonina, with a little confusion. "There are so many things to look at just now and to listen to, that I rather forgot about the nests. But we had better be going back to my aunt, had we not?"

"There seem to be a great many birds here,"

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said Radford, for the sake of keeping up the conversation, as they turned into a path.

"Thousands of them. You see they have had the park to themselves for years past. Even now I cannot bear to turn them out. Unluckily those horrid cuckoos destroy so many of the singing birds. It was cuckoos' eggs that I was looking for this morning, for I always take a pleasure in turning them out—that is, I was meaning to look for them."

"A great many birds and a great many flowers; why, I don't know what half of these things are called."

They were crossing a bit of meadow sprinkled with blue and white and yellow stars.

"I don't know many of their names either, but I know all their faces. I have been on nodding terms with every flower in the park ever since my babyhood. Where did you say my aunt is waiting for us?"

"Somewhere over there. I think we are in the right direction, unless we have lost our way."

And, indeed, among those thick-grown trees and numerous turns it was almost easier to lose one's way than to find it. Radford had begun by walking fast, but gradually, and without his knowing it, his pace relaxed. This green shade was so delicious that it seemed a pity to hurry through it.

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Even the profusion of flowers on all sides, though he was not distinctly aware of their presence, the scents in the air, the twittering in the branches, helped to excite him pleasantly. Well might he not know the names of half of the blossoms around him, for owing to the mixture of common weeds and of garden flowers run wild, and more still of the half-breeds produced by this contact, the flora of the Berenów park was calculated to puzzle even a botanist. Here the wall-flower and the lily of the valley stood cheek-by-jowl with the field daisy; and only by an occasional patch of degenerate sweet-william or dwarfed pansy was it possible to trace the spots which in days long passed had been decked with symmetrical flower-beds.

The charm of the moment seemed to have imparted itself to Antonina as well, for she also had ceased to hurry. Thus for many minutes they walked on, occasionally speaking, but often falling into silence; and every word that was said was accompanied by the scent of the lilac blossoms, and every silence was filled with the cry of the cuckoo.

As the minutes passed, the silences grew longer, and Radford began to be aware of an increasing oppression. He had thought he had quite steeled himself for this meeting with Antonina, but Antonina to-day was not quite the same Antonina whom he had hitherto known. Since last they met some-

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thing had softened her usual *brusquerie*, and this unusual gentleness, both in tone and manner, made him all the more fearful for his resolution.

It was when, on turning a corner, another long walk was entered, a close, shady walk that was as dim as a bower, that Radford became aware that something must immediately be done to avert the danger that was close at hand. He could not go on thus for many more minutes without succumbing; of this he felt certain.

This, then, was the moment for doing that which, in case of necessity, he had resolved to do. The necessity had come much quicker than he had supposed, and the thing must be done now, immediately.

"Pani Antonina," he began, without any preparation, "I have a confession to make to you."

At the abruptly spoken words Antonina started just perceptibly, then quickly recovered herself.

"Do you remember telling me your bad opinion of me last year, when we first met?"

Radford spoke hurriedly, for he had seen the start.

"Yes, I remember," she said, in some disturbance.

"Since that day I have often been on the point of telling you that there is even more in that matter of the duel than you suppose."

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"What more can there be? Of course it was very wrong of you to send the challenge."

"The challenge would have been nothing if Milnovics had ever done me any wrong, but he never did so."

"Then why did you challenge him?"

"Because I did not take the trouble to identify the right man. Listen, I beg of you." And in a few breathless sentences he gave her the outline of the unhappy episode. When he had done she looked into his face.

"Why do you tell me this?" she asked, in a tone of surprise.

"In order that you should know what sort of a man you have admitted to your house. I feel as though, until now, I had been accepted on false pretences. You were scarcely able to forgive me for the mere fact of the duel, what will you say now that you know the cause of this duel to have been utterly unjust?"

She did not speak at once, and began pulling some leaves off the twigs that were nearest at hand. As she walked slowly by his side there was a frown of perplexity and disturbance upon her face.

"I wish you would say something," said Radford impatiently.

Antonina opened her hand and watched the

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leaves which she had gathered flutter slowly to the ground.

"Of course it was very wrong of you," she said, without any excitement. "And its being a mistake makes it all the sadder for poor Lieutenant Milnovics. But, really, when you come to think of it, it was quite as wrong of him to accept your challenge. Yes; very wrong and foolish of him," she continued, with more vivacity. "If he had spoken out then, everything would have been cleared up and all sorts of complications saved."

As she spoke, the bench on which Baroness Mielecka was still patiently waiting had come in sight, and Radford was glad that it was so. He had said nothing in answer to Antonina's words. He understood that his last desperate remedy had failed, and that since, after all, he was too weak to do that which he had intended to do, his only safety must now be that which lies in flight.

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CHAPTER XIX.

It was a dull summer at the *plebanija* this year. The small excitements caused by Lieutenant Radford's visits had ceased, for in the middle of May the lieutenant had quite abruptly, and without any especially visible cause, taken leave of absence for several months, and was spending the summer with his parents. It was strange what a difference the presence or absence of this one man, whom not even his most ardent flatterers had ever ventured to call a brilliant conversationalist, made for quite half-a-dozen people. Outwardly, indeed, the every-day routine was the same as ever: the *Popa* said Mass in his tattered vestments, and surreptitiously patted the head of every baby he met in the village —he could not do so openly, for fear of hurting the feelings of any one at home; Madame Serpow made large stores of raspberry jam (which cost nothing, since the berries grew wild on the hillock), and Jusia stole as much of it as she could lay hands on; Agniecka continued to wait for her Ladislas; and the Deacon crept on his way, with his back

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bowed under the load of his troubles, as far from the peaceful resignation of the *Popa* as from the sham cheerfulness of his sister-in-law; but although some sense of soreness, or possibly pride, made most of these people shy of mentioning Radford's name, yet each was aware of missing him in his or her own particular way. It would happen that even Andrei, while herding his one cow by the river-side, with a stick in one hand and a book of church songs in the other—for Andrei was church-singer as well as everything else, and economised his time just as carefully as his wax-candles—would look keenly at any stray horseman that appeared on the road, and think sadly of the silver coin he was wont to get for holding the Pan Lieutenant's horse; while by the urchins, who had grown accustomed to scramble for handfuls of coppers in the ditch, Radford's absence was considered as nothing less than a public calamity.

To the *Popa* it seemed evident that Stepan, too, was pining for the companionship of his comrade. What else could mean this curious irritability and occasional shortness of temper, which in him was quite new? and why otherwise should his natural reticence, which for a time had seemed almost to be melting, have within the last month or two become so strangely aggravated? Possibly the want of companionship was enhanced by the want of

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interest in his occupation. So long as the *Pani* had been busy with the school, her eagerness had doubtless imparted itself to Stepan; but it was evident that she had now grown a little tired of the school. Indeed, other people besides Father Floryan had noticed that the *Pani* was becoming ever more restless, ever more difficult to please. To all appearances the beautiful summer months hung more heavily on her hands than the dismal winter months had done. Upon spurts of feverish activity there followed intervals of apparent apathy. Plans were made and dropped, reforms begun and left standing midway. She wanted to introduce a new costume into the village; to experiment upon the cultivation of the vine in Poland; to do a whole list of other things, of which the mere mention of each was a shock to Berenów traditions; and then when a dozen bales of striped cotton had arrived, and hundreds of young vine-plants been imported at a cost which set her guardian's hair on end, she changed her mind about the costumes, and forgot about the vines, which decayed slowly in an out-house, while furnishing an excellent retreat for families of young rats, as well as for any stray snake that might wander in. Baroness Mielecka was beginning to find herself at the end of her not very profuse wits. A husband seemed to her the only remedy for the present state of things; but where

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was a husband to be found, here at Berenów, since Lieutenant Radford had apparently failed?

"And yet she would only have to show herself in society," the Baroness would regretfully reflect. It had been impossible to watch her charge as nervously as she had been doing all summer, without noting that there were other changes in her besides an increase of eccentricity. Month by month she was growing more capricious, but month by month also she was growing more mellowed in colouring, more perfectly proportioned in form, better calculated to dazzle society and to turn the heads of men, and, if need be, break their hearts.

"But what is the good of it all, since she will not even enter a drawing-room?" the Baroness would almost sob in many a solitary hour. "I do believe she will end in being an old maid, unless, indeed, Lieutenant Radford comes back."

But it was long before Lieutenant Radford came back. He was not to see Berenów again until all the flowers that had bloomed upon that beautiful day in May when last he walked in the park had been reduced to brown stalks, and all the birds that had then filled his ears with their songs were either gone to warmer climates, or else sitting shivering and silent upon the bare branches. He had hoped not to see it for longer yet, even though his leave

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was now definitely at an end; the fault of his coming now was not his own, but Father Floryan's.

"Only imagine what Andrei tells me," the *Popa* announced on returning from a baptism one dreary November afternoon. "He says that on Wednesday, when he was in Lohatyn in order to have the censer mended, he spoke to Lieutenant Radford's servant, and learnt that the lieutenant has been back for nearly a fortnight, and without coming near us! I wonder what can be the cause?"

The *Popa* spoke with a touch of agitation. He was always just a trifle disturbed after having poured the baptismal water on the head of one of his new-born parishioners, whose puckered face and hairless skull was wont for a short space to render acute his latent yearnings after possible grandchildren; and the piece of news imparted by Andrei had not tended to lessen his disturbance.

"The cause is probably," remarked Madame Serpow, in her driest tone, "that the books and the tobacco and the eatables which he has brought us have ended by satisfying his conscience, and that the poor young man is tired of our society. It was bound to happen sooner or later."

Father Floryan shook his head incredulously.

"No, no, Jadwiga; I do not believe that of Lieutenant Radford: he is not like other young men. Most likely he has heard of poor Jusia's sick-

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ness and is afraid of intruding, but Andrei has to go in again on Monday to fetch the censer, and I shall send him a message then to say that we expect him."

Ever since the beginning of the autumn Jusia had been suffering from what appeared to be a severe fit of indigestion, produced, no doubt, by the accumulation of sweet stuffs in the stomach. The raspberries, which had been particularly plentiful this year, probably deserved a large share of the blame.

It was in consequence of the *Popa's* message that Radford, seeing that there was no further chance of lying concealed, came out to Berenów in the course of the following week. His visit was to be confined to the *plebanija*.

There was no one but Agniecka at home, watching over Jusia. Stepan, he was told, was busy at the schoolhouse, and both the *Popa* and his sister had gone up to the old church. There was a service going on there at this moment, for this chanced to be the All Souls' Day of the Ruthenians.

Radford went up the hill, rather than to the schoolhouse. Though it was little past the middle of the day, a low-hanging mist, which had not lifted since morning, made the dusk appear close at hand. The sound of monotonous chants reached him long before he had gained the top, and through

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the open door he could see lights dimly burning. He stood still and looked in curiously. The combined smell of incense, hot wax, and compressed humanity met him with the abruptness of a slap on the face. The bareheaded peasants were kneeling in closely packed rows, their eyes all turned towards the altar. Huge guttering candles of dark yellow wax, held by many a work-worn right hand, shone like torches in the interior of the dim church, for even here the mist seemed to have penetrated.

Over the heads of kneeling men and women Radford could catch sight of Father Floryan, in mourning vestments, reading the service, as well as of Andrei assisting him in an old uniform coat of Stepan's, minus the facings; and being possessed of excellent eyesight, he could even distinguish the empty mustard-pots and pickle-jars that were doing duty for flower-vases on the altar, and which doubtless were the same he had himself brought to Berenów, in the days when he had still expended his ingenuity in inventing excuses for such small gifts as could not be refused. His eyesight only required to be a little more excellent still to enable him to decipher the inscription of "Coleman's Mustard" below the bouquets of artificial roses, and to ascertain that the paper lilies on the Virgin's altar had taken the place of "Batty's Curry Powder."

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"Andrei is a genius," it passed through his mind to say, as his glance moved on.

It was a darkly-clad, black-veiled figure kneeling alone beside the one bench which the church contained, that caught his eye this time. Though half-screened by the peasants, Radford did not think he had mistaken her. No, he decided, he would not go into the church, after all; this was a danger of which he had not thought.

The graveyard outside was almost deserted. Here and there only a solitary figure was kneeling beside one of the mounds. Great, ragged shreds of mist, caught in the bare tree branches, floated above the poor graves, rudely decorated with scarlet berries and frost-bitten ferns, with here and there a penny candle flickering faintly, all that the season as well as the leisure of the hard-worked mourners could afford.

Radford had not gone many steps when one of the figures rose, and he recognised Madame Serpow. Perceiving him, she stuffed a large cotton handkerchief into her pocket, and bent down to give the finishing touches to a wreath of snowberries that was lying upon the mound beside her. At sight of the pocket-handkerchief Radford remembered that one of her children was buried here. He was always aware of a feeling of surprise whenever any chance circumstance brought it home to

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him that this parchment-like old woman was not an old maid.

It had been his intention to return straight to the *plebanija*, but it was impossible to pass without a word.

"Ah! so you have actually come," Madame Serpow observed, while still busy with her snowberries. "I think it is very hard upon you to be sent for in this fashion. This sort of thing is folly," she added, more abruptly.

"What sort of thing?"

"This dressing up of the graves. I do it because I have fallen into the habit, but really it is folly. Do you believe my Stasiu will sleep better because of this compound of twigs and berries above his head? I do not believe it. My last boy is buried here, you know," she went on, a little more quickly. "He survived his father by a few weeks, though he was doomed before then, and I brought him with me here. Change of air was to do him good, but it didn't; it was just ordained, I suppose, that it shouldn't do him good, or else," went on Madame Serpow, according to her habit of shifting the blame for everything backwards and forwards between Providence and her fellow-creatures, "maybe it was those cold baths, which that fool of a Lohatyn doctor prescribed, which finished him off. Anyway, he *was* finished off, and here

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he lies. I know the place by this crooked birch beside it."

Her long bony fingers went on picking nervously at the white berries while she spoke. Radford looked on in silence. It was the first time that he had heard Madame Serpow speak of that long-buried married life which must seem to herself almost like a dream.

At last she stood up straight, unbending her long back, and beginning to draw on a pair of shabby cloth gloves richly encrusted with the droppings of blest candles.

As she raised her head she looked Radford full in the face, and there were no tears in her eyes now, whatever there may have been before.

"You have grown older this summer," she remarked sharply.

"Of course I have grown older," he answered, with a constrained laugh. "Six months older."

"Not six months, rather six years. You have lost something since you went away, and also you have gained something. Tell me, by the way, have you been up to the house yet?"

"No; not yet."

"That will be thought strange of you. No doubt you are expected. Let me see—is not that the *Pani* herself coming from the church?"

Following the direction of her eyes, Radford

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turned and saw Antonina slowly walking among the graves, standing still now and then to look at one of the decorated mounds. She had evidently not yet perceived the two people standing beside the small grave with the big wreath of snowberries, but the direction she was following would probably lead her past the spot.

"You will excuse me, will you not?" said Radford, turning back to Madame Serpow, and speaking in a tone of sudden disturbance; "but I am afraid I cannot stay here any longer. I must go to the schoolhouse; I believe Stepan is there."

Madame Serpow fixed her grey eyes upon his face; they looked more penetrating than ever under their slightly reddened lids.

"Why are you in such a hurry? I thought you wanted to visit the *Popa?*"

"Yes; but the *Popa* is occupied. I shall wait for him at the *plebanija.*"

"You had better stay where you are," said Madame Serpow, and unexpectedly she laid her hand upon his arm, lowering her voice a little as she spoke. "Running away will make no difference in the end."

Radford flushed with surprise. "What do you mean?" he asked, almost roughly.

"You know quite well what I mean. At this moment you want to run away, and I think I know

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from what. I am not quite blind yet, you see, even though I am an old woman. You mustn't forget that I, too, have been young once upon a time, and have also wanted to be happy."

With a sort of gulp she interrupted herself, and again stooped for one second, and almost impatiently pushed the wreath into another position.

"You are only losing your strength with these would-be flights, and, whether you fly or not, everything will happen exactly as it is ordained. You think I saw nothing all last winter? You want to be generous, but that is all folly, my friend. Take my advice and make no more plans for the other one. Beside you he simply isn't in the running; and even putting you out of the calculation," she added, with cold-blooded distinctness, "you ought to have learnt by this time that a black man hardly ever has a chance with a black woman. Why, they even have the same eyebrows, and people don't fall in love with what they see daily in the glass. Don't you know that you are mapped out to be a *brunette's* hero? All yellow-haired men are."

Radford listened in amazement. How had this withered old woman come to read his secret with such ridiculous ease?

But there was no time to answer or to ask, for Antonina was already close at hand. On perceiving the two figures she coloured vividly, and for

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one second stood still, then came quickly towards the group.

"You are back," she said with undisguised delight. "I am so glad to see you!"

In the first impulse of surprise she had held out her hand to Radford in the old friendly fashion, and even her brown eyes were laughing with a frankly childish pleasure.

Radford never even saw her hand, he was too busy peering fiercely through her black lace veil. She was more beautiful; yes, certainly she was more beautiful than she had been in spring. The costly fur which touched her flushed cheek set off her warm colouring to perfection.

"Are you not going to shake hands with Pani Antonina?" said Madame Serpow's grating voice close beside him.

Then, only, he perceived his negligence and would have repaired it, but at that moment Antonina quickly withdrew her hand into her muff. Something about his face or manner had evidently helped her to recover herself. The childish joy faded out of her face, together with the bright colour.

"You have been a long time away," she said in a soberer tone, though the delight of the meeting was still reflected in her eyes. "I suppose this is your first visit to Berenów?"

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"My first, yes; and probably my last for some time," said Radford, looking not at Antonina but at Madame Serpow. "I am very busy this winter, far busier than last winter. Even to-day I have no time. You will excuse me, will you not? I told you that I must look for Stepan."

He was too excited to know how harshly he was speaking, or to understand that the abruptness with which he turned away came near to being openly rude.

Madame Serpow looked after his retreating figure with astonishment and disapproval painted upon her stern features. When the grey mist had swallowed him up, she shook her head once deliberately, and turned again towards Antonina.

The girl, too, was staring into the mist, and on her face, too, astonishment was written; she had grown somewhat pale, and tears of mortified pride stood in her widely opened eyes.

"Let him go," said the old woman, with her hard smile, "it won't alter anything in the end."

And at that moment a chorus of many voices rose upon the air, and from out of the open church-door dark figures came pouring tumultuously, each jostling the other with hard elbows in the race for some especial green mound. The indoor service was at an end, and the blessing of the graves about to begin.

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CHAPTER XX.

"Antusia, do you really mean it?"

It was Baroness Mielecka who spoke, and her expression was that of a person who has just heard a piece of news which seems too good to be true.

"I always mean what I say," was Antonina's reply as, without looking at her aunt, she left the room.

The Baroness remained seated alone at the breakfast-table, plunged in a sort of ecstatic bewilderment. Truly it was high time that something should intervene to save her from despair. The months of November and December had trailed past in one long *ennui*, scarcely lightened by a few very brief visits of Lieutenant Radford, whose military duties, according to his own account, were very much more pressing this winter than they had been last year. January promised to be no better, since the prospect of the Carnival was calculated only to raise pangs of regret in the would-be chaperon's bosom. What was the good of knowing that there was to be a ball at Lohatyn

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on the 10th, since she would in all probability not even have a chance of knowing who had worn what on the occasion?

As a last desperate means of killing the winter, the Baroness was beginning seriously to think of reading up the questions of Women's Rights and of Free Education, both of which she had been enthusiastically defending for thirty years past, and had for this purpose actually paid one visit to the Berenów library, when the face of the situation was completely changed by Antonina quietly announcing one morning that she had made up her mind to go to the ball on the 10th.

She made the announcement deliberately and a trifle defiantly, as though she was quite aware of the astonishment about to be produced, and prepared to challenge any criticism of her actions.

But the Baroness was far too happy either to criticise or to question. Having realised that this was a fact, not a dream, she rushed straight into preparations. Time was terribly short, seeing that Antonina had not said a word until the 4th, and it was impossible to avoid regretting that the delightful preliminaries to the 10th, instead of being lovingly spun out from week to week, had necessarily to be reduced to a few bald telegrams addressed to Lemberg dressmakers. But even as it

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was, her joy in the new turn of events was equalled only by her terror lest any obstacle should intervene. Since Antonina had changed her mind once, might she not change it again? The thought kept the Baroness in a state of suppressed panic. It was only when on the afternoon of the 10th she found herself seated beside her niece in the sledge that was to convey them to Lohatyn, with a trunk containing two ball-dresses safely strapped on at the back, that the anxious chaperon drew her first deep breath of relief.

There were various strange sledges to be seen at Lohatyn to-day, and the spare rooms in the "Black Eagle" were very fully occupied, for the first ball of the Carnival was always well attended. Almost every name known in the neighbourhood was to be represented here to-night, and not one officer in Lohatyn would, of his own free will, miss appearing.

Radford was among the first who reached the ballroom. Even though the preparations might not be complete, it would be more amusing to watch the Jewish waiters climbing on the chairs to light the candles, than to sit alone in his lodging. He was getting to hate that small room as an animal may hate its cage. He meant for the future to spend as little time in it as necessity permitted. To him, almost more than to any of his

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comrades, the Carnival was welcome, since it gave him an opportunity of escape. For weeks past he had been thinking of it, and had come to distinct resolutions. Last winter he had been a looker-on, but this winter he meant to be a partaker, a dancer, a Lothario, if need be; anything that could help him to think of other things and to draw a veil over one persistent recollection. Outward distraction was a remedy which he had not yet tried; he had heard that it could be of good service at times, and he had determined to give it a chance.

It was in accordance with his new principles that he arrived at the "Black Eagle" as early as the eagerest of young dancers. The scene scarcely looked very festive as yet, for Frau Apfelgrün, the proprietress, would never have dreamt of having the lights lit even one minute before the arrival of the first guest, and was as yet occupied in superintending the waxing of the floor. Young Nathaniel Apfelgrün assisted his mother by passing the legs of the cane chairs in review, and skilfully contriving to prop against the wall those whose supports struck him as not being equal to an independent position, occasionally, in extreme cases, doing a little doctoring with ends of twine. Only one fiddler had arrived, and was laboriously tuning his instrument. As yet the scene was illuminated principally by the brilliant moonlight, which, re-

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flected from the brilliant snow, poured in unchecked through the three curtainless windows.

Another half-hour passed before the room began gradually to fill. Almost all the figures and all the faces with which Radford had been familiar last Carnival followed each other through the open doorway, at longer or shorter intervals. There was scarcely one awanting, and there had as yet been nothing new. He turned away with a feeling of weariness. And yet he must make up his mind to choose a partner for the first quadrille. While he was consulting his programme, there was an exclamation close to him, and turning round, he saw Baroness Mielecka just crossing the threshold of the dancing-room, and immediately behind her Antonina, dressed in a cloudy white gown, and with a wreath of white flowers in her hair. As he looked he felt the blood retreating to his heart, and the next moment mounting again to his face with almost unbearable heat. But even now he did not quite trust his eyes. The thing was too utterly unexpected to be believed on the instant. When he had looked at her hard for a minute longer, he turned to the comrade who was beside him.

"Can you tell me, Pribnoff," he asked, "who that lady in white is who has just come in?"

"That? Why, that is the Brunowska girl, of course. Didn't you know they were coming? Frau

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Apfelgrün told me yesterday that the rooms were engaged. And, by the by, she must be an acquaintance of yours; she lives at Berenów, you know. Surely I have heard you mention her?"

"Yes, I have seen her," said Radford lamely; "but people look so different in ball-dress."

He had heard the name now and could no longer doubt. Antonina was really here, but how could he explain her presence? Was it a sudden craving for gaiety which had brought her? But why should one to whom the world stood open seek this gaiety in Frau Apfelgrün's Hotel rather than in Lemberg *salons?* The question set his heart beating faster. Across the breadth of the room he attempted to study her face. There was a remarkable contrast between that of the chaperon and her charge. It was on the elder face, rather than on the younger one, that joyful expectation was written. The Baroness, in her mauve brocade, looked simply radiant, while Antonina appeared indeed to be excited, but to judge from the expression of her black eyebrows and the restlessness of her hands, it was not entirely a pleasurable excitement. Her aunt alone knew that this disturbance had been growing for some days past, and had been alarmed by the obstinate silence which the girl had maintained during the last few hours. Was it possible that, after all, she regretted

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her resolution? Well, thank heaven, it was too late now for complete retractation.

The music struck up while Radford still stood watching, and at the same moment he was roused by the voice of Lieutenant Berger, of his own squadron.

"Look here, Radford," he was eagerly saying, "I am told that you know the Pani Brunowska; you will introduce me, won't you? It would be nonsense not to dance with a girl like that, and scarcely anybody else seems to know her. Come along, I beg of you, while the waltz is still on."

It was a request which could not in common politeness be refused. Radford led his comrade across the room and introduced him to the two ladies.

It was with an almost prim little nod that Antonina replied to his address. To-day she did not hold out her hand, as she had done when she met him in the old graveyard on All Souls' Day, neither was there any smile upon her lips. Without a word she straightway rose and accepted Lieutenant Berger's invitation to a waltz tour.

While she was whirling round the room on his comrade's arm, Radford stood and followed the pair with his eyes. When he brought up Lieutenant Berger it had been his intention to do no more than introduce the other and then retire. But An-

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tonina's gesture of greeting had given his thoughts another direction. Though she had not spoken, he was instantly aware of some acute change in her manner. How was this? Could it be possible that he was alarming himself uselessly? The supposition that Antonina had come to this ball on his account, though in one sense almost terrifying, had, in another, been unavoidably agreeable, and the discovery that possibly he had been mistaken in this supposition was just as unavoidably mortifying. He began to wonder how it would be possible to test this point a little further. Should the danger still be present, he would naturally have to resume his flight; but first he would like to satisfy himself that the danger actually existed. There was a touch of absurdity in running away from a mere phantom.

Thus he told himself as he watched the figure in white being claimed by one partner after another. An ever-growing uneasiness took possession of him as he stood thus inactive among so many moving figures. Whenever he left his post, it was only to lead up another of his comrades to Antonina, for it was to him that everybody insisted on coming for an introduction; and each of them in turn laid his arm round her waist and carried her off with him to the tune of the Blue Danube, and only he alone was to stand as though in disgrace and look

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on at their enjoyment. Why he alone? The question came oftener and oftener. Had not he as good a right as they to feel her fingers between his own, and her arm upon his shoulder? As with strained eyes he followed her, his pulses were beginning to fly. The instinctive dread of approaching her which at first had held him back had not been conquered, it had melted away in the heat of desire. Without being aware of having formulated any resolution, Radford stepped up to Antonina's side and asked her to dance.

She looked at him in surprise, still breathless from her last round, then after what looked like a moment of hesitation, quickly sat down.

"I am too tired," she said shortly. "I cannot dance any more just now."

The waltz music came to an end as she spoke, and the couples began to disperse.

There was a vacant chair beside Antonina, and Lieutenant Berger, with an expectant smile upon his face, was at that moment approaching. Radford boldly sat down. Berger had danced with Antonina; there was no reason for granting him the additional pleasure of sitting beside her.

"Do you know that I scarcely believed my eyes, Pani Antonina, when I first saw you in the ballroom to-night?" he remarked, fixing his eyes upon her face.

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"That is very natural," said Antonina, noisily opening her fan. "Considering how seldom you have seen my face lately, your having recognised me at all shows that you have a most excellent memory."

Her voice shook with badly suppressed spite, and she kept her eyes obstinately fixed upon her fan.

"It was not you that I found difficult to recognise, but your principles. I thought that going to balls was against all your theories of life."

He felt astonished at his own temerity. It was wonderful what the atmosphere of a ballroom could do. Was it the music and the lights around him, or was it the unexpectedness of this meeting which had put to flight all the small timidities and scruples which on an ordinary occasion would have been certain to beset him? He saw the ominous fold between Antonina's black eyebrows, he saw the flush of anger on her face; but, instead of feeling alarmed, he was conscious of enjoying these signs of displeasure.

"What do you know about my principles?" she asked quickly. "I don't think I ever talked to you about such things as that."

"Oh yes, you did—in the days when I still counted as a friend. It is *your* memory which appears to be bad."

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He felt aware that he was beginning to lose his hold on himself, but as yet there was no alarm in the thought. Her near vicinity was acting too directly on his senses. In her glistening white draperies she appeared to him like a bride ready dressed for the altar. The white hawthorn flowers which she wore in her hair supplied the place of orange blossoms. In some indistinct way they reminded him of the park at Berenów, and of the spring day when he had first guessed her secret. There was something in that flowery, thorny wreath crowning the wide childish brow which peculiarly suited her vivid style of beauty, the proud poise of the head, the fiercely pure gaze. There were fair blossoms in that wreath, but there were also sharp thorns. To Radford it seemed as though they were weaving a prickly barrier between him and her. His excited imagination almost let him feel the points of those thorns in his fingers. It even occurred to him to compare himself in his own mind with the prince in the fairy tale who, in order to reach the sleeping Beauty, has to break his way through the thickets of a century. But the very pain acted as an incentive; he would not yet give in.

At his last words Antonina's face had darkened by another shade, but she made no reply.

"No doubt you had good grounds for altering

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your resolution," he remarked, in the sharpest tone of sarcasm which he was able to assume. "Most likely it was in order to please your aunt that you visited the ball to-day."

"Yes, it was in order to please my aunt," said Antonina, raising her eyes at last from her fan. Her head was held high; and though she blushed scarlet at the barefacedness of her own lie, she was now looking him in the face, full and defiantly.

"Yes, it was to please my aunt; but I wish I had chosen some other way of doing so. It doesn't seem worth while to break with one's ideals for the sake of this sort of thing."

She cast what was meant to be a contemptuous glance round the room as she spoke, and yet her eyes belied her, for she could not quite disguise their sparkle. What she saw was a poor show indeed; but it served its end, seeing that in her memory there were no more brilliant pictures stored, to which the present scene might have been unfavourably compared. It was her first glimpse of gaiety, her first taste of power, and, however bitterly she might reproach herself with the weakness of having come at all, it was difficult to remain quite sober, now that she actually was here.

"Of course one need not stay to the end," she remarked aloud, ostentatiously, as a conclusion to her reflections.

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"You are disappointed already?" said Radford quickly, panic-stricken at the bare vision of the idea suggested. "Surely you cannot be thinking of going yet? Wait till the first *Mazur;* it is that which puts the thing *en train.*"

"I thought you didn't dance the *Mazur,*" was Antonina's apparently irrelevant reply.

"I have been taking lessons lately—indeed I have. I am not perfect yet, but I am progressing."

"Ah, really? I had no notion that you had been making such elaborate preparations for the Carnival. You should have mentioned your dancing-lessons to Aunt Pawlina, and then, perhaps, she would have left off bothering you about coming out to Berenów."

"What have I to look for at Berenów?" asked Radford, in sudden irritation. "Who is likely to miss my presence there?"

The sharpness of her tone, which had begun by amusing him, had ended by hurting him acutely. Just at present he was not calm enough to analyse its ground, and felt only aware of the pain. And yet he must overcome the barrier at any price, even though he had to tear his fingers till they bled upon the prickly thorns. He must know what lay beyond. All summer he had lived in the belief that the power of making himself loved by this woman lay in his hand; and even although he did not want

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to use that power, he wished to be convinced that he still possessed it.

Up to a minute ago it was he who had kept the upper hand in the tacit struggle; now it was she who had regained it, as in the long-run the woman unavoidably does wherever a game of comedy is being played. By this time she had recovered from her first flurry, whereas the idea of her leaving the ballroom—flimsy subterfuge though it was—had frightened him out of his assumed self-possession.

"What have you to look for at Berenów?" repeated Antonina coolly. "Why, nothing of course, since, unfortunately, we have no dancing-master in the village, unless, indeed, Lieutenant Milnovics would be kind enough to instruct you. He looks as though he must be a perfect dancer."

Radford looked at her keenly, trying to meet her glance. That name dragged in so unnecessarily at this moment was like another sharp thorn. He wanted to see her eyes as she pronounced it; but she was again studying her fan, and only at the corners of her mouth was the flicker of an almost cruel smile to be seen. He said to himself that he would get up and leave her; but at that moment she broached a new subject by some irrelevant inquiry, and ten minutes later he was still in his place, and she was still amusing herself with alternately

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enraging and soothing him, speaking or sitting silent, meeting his glance or avoiding it, according as it best suited her at the moment.

They were sitting thus when the fiddles struck up the first bars of a new melody.

Antonina's face suddenly changed.

"Is that the *Mazur* beginning?" she asked quickly. "That music seems to get into my blood."

"Yes, it is the *Mazur*. Who do you dance it with?"

"With nobody; I don't think I am engaged."

"I suppose you would not have the courage to dance it with me?" asked Radford, a little sulkily. "I believe I can manage the step."

"With you?" She looked at him and hesitated. "I think I had better look on," she added, more coldly.

The couples were being placed by the *Arrangeur*. Antonina said nothing more, but sat watching intently. The signal was given, and the *Mazur* began. She still did not move, but her eyes dilated, and with her fan she was unconsciously following the rhythm of the most *entraînant* of all dance-music. As the string of dancing couples passed them for the second time, she started from her seat.

"Come, we will try," she said impetuously to Radford. "It is impossible to sit still."

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And they quickly took their places as the last of the string.

Twenty minutes later the *Mazur* was over, and the heated couples thronged round the *buffet*. Radford and Antonina were among them.

"After all, this is more intoxicating than dancing at home to my aunt's accompaniment," Antonina was saying radiantly to her partner as she sipped her lemonade. "And really you dance quite beautifully."

In the glow of music and movement the last of her reserve had melted. Displeasure, self-reproach, everything had given way to the enjoyment of the moment, and as over the edge of her glass she smiled into his face, Radford felt himself thrill under the fire of her glance.

From this point onwards the details of the evening were lost in one long sensation of delight. Radford gave himself no account of what he was doing. He did not know to what this was to lead. He knew only that the scene around him breathed gaiety and gladness, that Antonina was smiling at him at last with lips and eyes, that at last he had broken his way through the thorns and had reached the flowers.

"Yes, he is a very distinguished young man," Baroness Mielecka remarked later on in the evening to a Lemberg acquaintance who had unex-

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pectedly turned up here. "But, of course, I should never dream of influencing Antonina's choice, however much I may desire the marriage."

"But I thought you were just saying that marriage as an institution has outlived itself," remarked her neighbour, a mild, motherly woman, whom for an hour past the Baroness had been bewildering with an array of opinions, whose *fin-de-siècle* colouring harmonised strangely with the indefinable, yet unmistakable Court flavour which seemed for ever to hang about the person of the former lady of honour.

"So it has," replied the Baroness, recollecting her *rôle*. "But we have to make concessions to the weakness of others."

In face of such utterances as these how could the excellent Madame Kruzecka have a chance of guessing that she was talking to a woman who was to the full as mild and to the full as motherly as she was herself?

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CHAPTER XXI.

The Carnival of this year happened to be one of the shortest in the calendar; but, possibly on this very account, it made up in liveliness for what it lacked in length. Every one seemed to feel that the briefer the dancing season the better use must be made of it, for it is a short life that is generally considered bound to be a merry one; and the consequence was that Frau Apfelgrün barely had time to renew the burnt-out candles in the candelebra and to clear the floor of the scraps of coloured tulle and crushed artificial flowers which strewed it, before the room was again wanted.

At each of these balls Radford was present, and at each he met Antonina, not by any preconcerted arrangement, but by what appeared to be the unavoidable course of events. Having taken the first step, the girl seemed to have been seized by an ever-growing desire for gaiety, for enjoyment, or else for something that lay beyond the mere enjoyment.

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Radford had ceased to make any attempt to justify himself in his own eyes, neither did he, in general, accuse himself. In face of Antonina's frankly shown preference, he had simply lost account of his own actions. His sensations were those of a person who, without any doing of his own, has drifted into the very heart of a current against which he knows it would be useless to fight. "Whatever you do, it will have to be," Madame Serpow had said on the day when she stood beside her child's grave. Sometimes, with a thrill of mingled delight and alarm, he would remember the words, and once more the hopelessness of fighting against the current would be borne in upon him. He had held out for long; but the very length and rigour of his abstinence had but served to sharpen his hunger for happiness. The wishes which for wellnigh a year had been accumulating would no longer be repressed. With the vehemence of a half-starved man he put out his hand towards that which he desired. Before the middle of the Carnival was reached, Radford was talked of openly as the suitor of Antonina Brunowska.

The frosty weeks flew past with the brilliancy of a dream. Radford's visits to the *plebanija* had almost ceased. To play the comforter there any longer appeared to him too absurd a farce to be kept up, and the mere thought of meeting Stepan

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was growing daily more distasteful. Lately, also, he had been at moments aware of a new feeling in his comrade's presence, a feeling of inexplicable yet unmistakable irritation. The sight of the disabled arm, which formerly had never failed to stir his pity, now came near to moving his anger. It was a standing reproach which for ever was being obtruded upon his notice. On the day when he had made his final confession to Antonina, her unexpected condemnation of Stepan's part in the affair of the duel had begun by outraging his sense of justice; but by degrees he had grown so well used to this new view of the case that, unconsciously, he came near to adopting it himself. The more he considered the matter the more distinctly did he perceive that the guilt of that unhappy episode had been quite as much on Stepan's side as on his own. Yes, it was true, one word only, one question on the other's part, would have cleared away the entire misunderstanding, and saved not only himself from misfortune but also his comrade from the burden of self-reproach. And meeting Milnovics again on the back of these reflections, Radford would look at him almost revengefully, as at the cause of his own mental discomfort.

But, for the present at least, the mental discomfort had ceased. So cleverly did he manage matters at this time that once only in the course of these

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weeks he found himself alone with his old comrade. Neither spoke immediately.

"I suppose you are very busy at the school?" Radford remarked at random, when the silence was becoming unbearable. The emptiness of the conventional question disgusted himself, but it was better than this terrible silence.

"I am about as busy as usual," was Stepan's indifferent reply.

And again a minute passed without a word being spoken.

"Why do you never come in to the Lohatyn balls?" said Radford abruptly. "Surely you are able to take a holiday at times?"

His own words surprised him. He had not been conscious of having formulated the thought. It was one of the rare moments in which something within him still awoke to make a half-hearted effort against the almighty current.

"I cannot go to Lohatyn," said Stepan, "because I have sold my uniform coat. And besides," he added, with a listless smile, "what should I do in a ballroom without a right arm?"

There was nothing intentionally pointed in the words. He spoke of his arm in the same impartial tone in which he spoke of his coat, but Radford felt that after this he could say no more. A sense of oppression had fallen upon him and held him so

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long as he was in Stepan's presence. Once in the open air it left him again, and it wanted only one of Antonina's innocently seductive smiles to draw him back gladly and joyfully into the heart of the current.

It was not until the last day but one of the Carnival that the rude awakening came. On the following evening the final dance was to take place, a costume-ball, as had been settled among the young people at the last moment. Radford started for Berenów early in the afternoon, in order to acquaint Antonina with the alteration in to-morrow's programme.

He had just reached the beginning of the poplar avenue when he perceived the *Pani's* sledge going rapidly towards the village. There was nothing for it but to follow her; but her horses were quicker than his, and it was only at the moment when she stopped before the *plebanija* that he succeeded in overtaking her.

"Have you also come to inquire?" were Antonina's first words on perceiving Radford. "Poor Jusia is said to be worse, you know."

"No, I did not know it. Is she worse? That is very distressing," said Radford, conscious of the indifference of his tone, yet unable to feign a deeper interest. "It was to bring you a message from the ball committee that I came out to-day." And he told her of the plan for to-morrow.

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"A costume-ball!" said Antonina in a livelier tone. "Oh, that would indeed be fun! But what on earth am I to wear? I have nothing but my peasant-dress which I could put on at such short notice as this. As soon as I know how Jusia is, I shall give my mind to the matter. Poor Father Floryan! I wonder how he would bear to lose Jusia?"

"Yes, poor Father Floryan," repeated Radford, and for a moment he attempted, not very successfully, to concentrate his attention on this new subject. Such things as these harmonised badly with his present state of mind. He turned from them impatiently, as from an unwelcome interruption, to other, far pleasanter sensations.

"It would be a great blow to him of course. But you are surely not thinking of staying away from the ball to-morrow on that account?" he added uneasily. "After all, you cannot do any good here."

"I suppose I shall go," said Antonina, a little doubtfully. Her radiant joyousness of the past weeks was sobered to-day by just one shade; but this quieter mood became her dangerously well. "It does seem rather heartless, does it not, to think of one's amusement when our friends here are in such distress. But, after all, as you say, we could do no good,—and besides, it is the

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very last ball, you know. Yes; I think I shall go."

"So shall I," said Radford, and they looked at each other almost a little guiltily.

"By the by," began Antonina again, "will the gentlemen also be in costume? and what are you going to wear?"

"My choice is as limited as yours. I have nothing but an English hunting-coat to put on."

"Splendid! That will make you quite into an English squire."

Antonina laughed, and then checked herself, remembering that she might possibly be seen from the windows. She had left her sledge by this time, and was standing beside Radford in front of the closed door of the house. Neither of them seemed in a hurry to go in.

"It is possible that I may soon turn into an English squire in reality," said Radford. "I don't think I have told you yet that a relation of my father's has lately left him an estate in Sussex. He is very anxious for me to undertake the management of it, and become an Englishman again."

"And will you go?" asked Antonina in a startled tone.

"I don't know. I cannot think of anything until the Carnival is over. It will be over the day after to-morrow," he remarked, more to himself than to her.

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"Yes, the day after to-morrow," said Antonina, with a quick little sigh.

"But we ought to be going in," she added immediately, for she had caught sight of a figure at the window, and had remembered what it was that had brought her here.

Signs of disturbance were visible within the house. On the very threshold Antonina almost ran against Andrei, just starting on some urgent errand. Through the open door of the kitchen both the big and the little schoolmistresses could be seen making *tisanes* under Madame Serpow's directions, and in the parlour, where half-a-dozen small oil-lamps were burning dimly before the Virgin's picture in the corner, Father Floryan was sitting alone with a face which shone with a ghastly pallor through the early winter dusk, and with his burnt-out *chibouk* held between his unsteady fingers.

"They say she is going to be taken from us," he said to Antonina in his weak, tearful voice. "This will be the second that it has pleased the Almighty to take; there will only be Stepan and Agniecka left now. My poor little Jusia! She was not clever, not like other girls; but she was content, and we were content to see her so. How is she now, Agniecka?" he anxiously inquired, as his elder daughter came in behind the visitors.

"Much quieter, I think," replied Agniecka,

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smiling convulsively. She was dressed in an untidy dressing-gown, and her disordered hair and haggard eyes made it clear that she had been up all night. "I am almost certain that she will be better to-morrow."

"That is not what the doctor says," remarked the *Popa* sadly.

"No, not exactly," Agniecka admitted with a sort of gulp. "I don't say that the doctor may not possibly be right; but even supposing he is right," she went on feverishly, "we—we must not forget how much harder the blow might have been. If one of us has to go, surely it is Jusia who can best be spared. And she suffers nothing, she knows nothing; there is no pain, no pain at all. But just imagine, father, try and imagine what you would have felt if the lot had fallen upon Stepan! That indeed would have been cruel!"

"And if it had fallen upon Stepan?" said Stepan's own voice from the open doorway. "I want to hear the end of your argument, Agniecka. Why would that have been cruel indeed?"

He did not look towards the visitors, whom in the fast-falling dusk he had evidently not perceived.

"Because that would have left such an empty place, such a terribly empty place," said Agniecka, beginning suddenly to sob.

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"There are plenty of people at hand to fill my place," answered Stepan, coldly and bitterly.

"But, my dearest brother——"

"Be quiet!" he said with unexpected vivacity. "I know what you want; you want to prove that Jusia's death will not be a sorrow, but a blessing. This is not a moment for playing comedy. For God's sake let us call things by their names. Jusia is dying, and we all know that she is dying, and we wish we could keep her, since we loved her and needed her—such as she was. What we have to bear let us at least bear without disguise. I entreat of you to be quiet! You tell lies to yourself, but you do not believe them."

He had spoken loud and sharply, and at the last word he stepped up to the window and stood staring out into the yard, his back turned towards the room. His sister and his father looked at him anxiously but in silence. These outbreaks of irritation had lately shown themselves frequently, but none had been as pronounced as this one.

"May I not go to Jusia for one minute?" Antonina's voice said, a little unsteadily in the midst of the silence.

Stepan turned quickly from the window, for the first time aware of her presence in the room.

"If you think you will not mind——" Agniecka

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was beginning doubtfully, when her brother intervened.

"There is no sense in your going and no use," he said decisively, stepping forward as he spoke, as though to bar Antonina's passage. "A new face would only disturb her."

"But I should be very quiet, Lieutenant Milnovics; you can trust me."

"No," he said, in the same tone, "it must not be. What is to be seen there is not cheering. There is no reason why you too should be distressed. You do not yet know what pain is; why should you go to meet it? It will come to you also in time, never fear!"

"But I think I can bear the sight of pain," said Antonina almost timidly, and she looked at him across the dusky room earnestly, with beseeching eyes.

"No, it must not be," he said again, in a tone of rough command. "I ask of you not to go."

She gazed at him in astonishment. For a moment it seemed as though the opposition to her will was about to rouse her to anger; but instead of speaking she sat down again in silence. Perhaps she had remembered that her guilt towards this man was great enough already.

Stepan was still standing in the middle of the room. His glowing eyes and heightened colour

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were enough to show how far moved he was out of his habitual reserve. In the moment when Antonina yielded to his wish, he threw one long glance towards her, and then turned and went out into the passage, as though aware that he was losing his self-control.

Radford had been near enough to read that one long look. There had been gratitude in the glance, but there had also been so passionate a pain that the sight took him suddenly aback. He had perfectly understood and perfectly approved of Stepan's objection to Antonina entering the sick-room; his rival's anxiety to spare her even a painful sight had been entirely appreciated by him. It must be so, since he loved her, and that Stepan loved her he had known for long; but what he had not known, and had not reckoned with, was the intensity of the passion revealed to him in that one unguarded moment when the burning black eyes, looking out of the thin, dark face, told their story aloud. It was as though a gulf had been unveiled at his feet. And how thin the face was, he told himself with a stab at his heart, how sharp in outline it had become within the last months! Now that his eyes were opened, he could see even this.

"Can I love like *this?*" he asked himself almost in awe. It was not that he doubted his own capacity for love; but perhaps he darkly felt that

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the passion of the man who possesses other things besides his love will always be a different thing from the passion of him who, in the whole wide world, has nothing but this love to live for.

He took his leave hurriedly and early, for there had come over him the necessity for being alone.

When he passed by the kitchen-door this time, the pot with the *tisane* was boiling over on the stove, and both schoolmistresses were looking wistfully out of the window towards the village street, up which the schoolmaster's tall figure could be seen disappearing.

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CHAPTER XXII.

Radford rose next morning with the thought that an event was going to take place that day. For the first time for many weeks past he was mentally sober. One moment had sufficed to shake him out of his delicious drowsiness, and to open his eyes to the sense of his own treachery. He trembled at the thought that he had stopped short of the danger barely in time. Without the chance of yesterday, what would to-night have brought? The result of the last ball of the Carnival appeared almost inevitable.

But now it should bring something quite different. He did not mean to avoid the meeting with Antonina, but he meant to make use of it for a new purpose. An idea had come into his mind, and he had immediately resolved to act upon it. He was quite clear as to what he wanted to do, and quite deliberate in his contemplation of the means most likely to lead him to his end. It happened that he was unusually busy that day; but whatever his occupation, whether he stood in the riding-

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school or walked the barrack-room, he never once lost sight of this end. All day long it stood before his eyes, and he looked at it steadily, and did not flinch at the sight.

His duties kept him tied for so long that, having hurried home to exchange his *Uhlanka* for a scarlet hunting-coat, he found the windows of the "Black Eagle" already brightly illuminated, and a group of lookers-on, with chattering teeth but eager eyes, watching the moving figures within.

Despite the *improvisé* character of most of the costumes, the dancing-room was a pleasant sight to any but the most incorrigibly *blasé* eyes, and of such there were not many here to-night. The notice had been too short to allow one to do more than powder one's hair and loop up one's dress *à la rococo*, or else to put on a straw hat, and, with a staff in one's hand, call oneself a *bergère;* but the effect of the gay medley was, all things considered, surprisingly good. People whose hair was long and fair had let it down their backs, under the welcome pretext of representing an *Undine*, and people who possessed black dresses and black eyes had strewn scarlet bows on their skirts, and thus easily transformed themselves into a sort of primitive *Satanellas*.

Radford looked about him in the crowd in search of Antonina. After a few minutes he per-

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ceived her standing beside her aunt in her Ruthenian peasant dress. It occurred to him that he had not seen her in this dress since the evening, more than a year ago, on which he had met her in the village street, flying from the drunken peasant. Baroness Mielecka, her mauve brocade decked with roses and her meagre hair *poudré*, was looking strangely at home in this fashion of an age which she loved to stigmatise as the *ancien régime*.

Radford soon perceived that Antonina also was looking about her as though in search of something. The next moment their eyes met, and she smiled at him across the room. In face of that smile and of the gladness upon her face, Radford set his teeth, and once more repeated to himself his resolve. He had felt hard and strong all day—it would not do to let himself be softened or weakened at the last moment.

He was already engaged to Antonina for several dances, and the moment the music for the first of these struck up he went up punctually and claimed it. She received him with a radiant look, and talked gaily during the quadrille. The impromptu costume-ball evidently caused her a genuinely childish pleasure. It was only towards the end of that first dance that she appeared to become aware of something peculiar in her partner's manner. Her gaiety found no response in him; her laughter was

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not echoed. He was strangely quiet for so lively a scene, and his face looked graver than she had ever seen it. What could this change signify? What was it that was impending? By degrees her own talk and laughter died out, and at moments she glanced at him with frightened, questioning eyes, in expectation of something which she felt to be close at hand.

As supper-time approached, the dancers began to pair off towards the neighbouring room. It had lately become Radford's acknowledged privilege to escort Antonina to the supper-table, but to-night he was not so quick as usual in claiming his right. Antonina, sitting almost alone, looked at him with astonishment and mortification on her face; for the room was emptying fast, and in face of the events of the Carnival, no comrade of Radford's would have considered it permissible to offer his arm to Antonina.

The Baroness, who was deep in the description of a fancy-ball with which her royal patron of forty years ago had sought to enliven her exile, was aroused by her neighbour to the urgency of the situation.

"But they are nearly all gone," said this lady suddenly. "What is the matter with Lieutenant Radford to-night?"

Baroness Mielecka looked round and saw Rad-

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ford standing at the other side of the room, apparently absorbed in searching for a possible speck of dusk upon the sleeve of his scarlet hunting-coat.

"You are going to take in my niece, are you not?" said the Baroness sweetly, and without either hesitation or scruple. She could not see that there was anything to hesitate about. All young men had moments of diffidence, and it was the chaperon's duty to encourage them—so long as they were eligible.

In reply, Radford could do no less than step forward. He did so immediately, and with the air of a man who has come to a decision.

"Maybe it will be better so," was the thought in his mind as he offered his arm to Antonina.

"What a magnificent fellow that Englishman is!" said Madame Kruzecka, as, together with the Baroness, she followed the two young people to the supper-room. "He looks as though he had been born in that coat!"

"Yes, he is a very agreeable young man," replied the Baroness, with just a touch of reserve in her tone. Now that the matter seemed so near its happy conclusion, she considered it due to her dignity to speak with more restraint. "But, to return to what I was telling you,—the dear Queen, as I say, looked magnificent in her Elizabethan ruff; the pearls on her spencer alone cost——"

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And from this point onward, the conversation became fit to be printed in a fashion-journal only.

Supper was being gaily but hastily eaten in Frau Apfelgrün's supper-room, for it was well known that the *cotillon* was to follow immediately, and must be closed on the stroke of midnight. Half-a-dozen distracted waiters in second- or third-hand dress-coats were hopping about between the tables, doing their best to respond to the hurried and impatiently spoken demands. After a much shorter interval than usual, chairs began to be pushed back and gloves to be put on. The more impatient of the dancers moved out again, leaving their plates and glasses almost full. In less than twenty minutes the room was once more half empty. Presently also the Baroness rose.

"Do not let yourself be hurried," she said to her niece, who was playing with a piece of cold ham on her plate. "I shall see that you get good places in the dancing-room. Lieutenant Radford will take care of you in the meantime, but be sure to eat your ham."

Antonina made no reply to her aunt. So long as the Baroness was in the room she went on slowly cutting up her ham; the moment that the mauve train had disappeared through the doorway she laid down her knife and fork, but still she made no movement as though to rise. Neither did Rad-

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ford move. He looked impatiently at the few people who were still sitting, as though their presence were inconvenient to him. In a few minutes more even the last of these was gone, and but for a couple of waiters clearing away the glasses from one of the distant tables, Radford was alone with Antonina. If he had anything to say to her, this was the moment to begin, but he did not immediately speak; he looked at her in silence for some moments longer, as she sat before him with lowered eyes, playing with the fringes on her costume. Her lips were parted expectantly, and the coloured beads upon her bosom rose and fell with her quick, short breaths. Fifteen months ago Radford had seen these same beads being threaded; they had seemed to him then what in truth they were—coarse, though brilliant glass beads. To-day they appeared to him like living jewels, full of a fire of many colours that had been lit especially for his torment. Not one of the ball-dresses which she had worn since the beginning of the Carnival, however carefully planned by the Baroness, had shown off Antonina's glowing and perfected beauty as did the white and scarlet richly embroidered peasant dress which for so long had not seen daylight.

Radford shook his head and turned his eyes resolutely to the window. Out there on the *Platz* he could distinguish the dark mass of lookers-on,

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still huddled together, and still staring at the lighted windows. He made up his mind to keep that group in his eye while he spoke, so as to have an excuse for not looking at Antonina; but still he let some seconds pass in silence.

In a minute more the *cotillon* music struck up. Neither he nor she seemed to hear it. The two remaining waiters disappeared, having exhausted all the dregs in the beer-glasses, and probably anxious not to miss any of the spectacle in the dancing-room.

Radford gathered all his strength together.

"I have something to say to you," he began, in a harsh, unamiable voice, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the crowd outside.

Antonina started, although she had been expecting almost these words. With lowered head she went on pulling faster at her fringes.

"Yes," he went on slowly, "I have had it on my mind for a long time past. Perhaps you can guess what it is." He fetched one deep, short breath before going on. "It is about my friend that I want to speak to you—Stepan Milnovics. He loves you, and you know that he loves you; he has loved you for long. Most probably it is the consciousness of the difference of position between you which keeps him from pleading his own cause. But I have made up my mind to do it for

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him. This cannot astonish you, for you know his history and mine. He is a man worthy of you in every way."

Radford spoke without embarrassment or haste. It seemed almost as though he were reading his sentences from off the dark surface of the *Platz* outside, upon which his eyes were still steadily fixed through the half-frozen window-pane.

When he paused there was no answer; and, glancing quickly towards her, he met her eyes fixed upon him, full of a broadly written and reproachful astonishment. Immediately he looked away, and pressing his hands tightly together, he went on speaking. He had foreseen that it would be so. This was the penance which he had prescribed to himself for having been too happy all the Carnival.

"Worthy of you in every way," he obstinately repeated. "With him you would certainly be happy,—happier, most likely, than—with others. You have only got to know him better in order to——"

He stopped short, for Antonina had abruptly risen.

"Is this all you have to say to me?" she asked, in a voice which shook with ill-concealed passion. Her cheeks were burning, and her eyes, as she looked down upon him, shone with a proud, revengeful light.

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Without waiting for his answer, she turned and went towards the door. But on the very threshold she faltered, and, standing still, threw one more look backwards,—a different look already,—softened, questioning, almost pleading. Then she turned again and was gone.

Radford started from his seat,—until that moment he had not moved. He knew that no word was wanted, that he only had to follow her. He made a step forward, and half stretched out his arms after the retreating figure. But in the same instant he stood still, staring in front of him, fixedly and fearfully, as people stare at some object of sudden alarm, as Macbeth at the supper-table may have stared at the ghost of Banquo.

"No; I have no right to be happy," he said, and his arms sank to his sides. "I may not be happy unless *he* allows me."

He sat down again and, without knowing what he did, took hold of the two sides of his chair, perhaps because he felt both physically and mentally giddy, perhaps in order to keep himself more certainly from rising again and following her. It was only with a supreme effort that he had succeeded in mastering himself.

Early in the forenoon of Ash-Wednesday Radford was on his way to Berenów. To-day he went

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straight to the *plebanija.* There was only one thought in his mind: that the present situation was unbearable, and must be ended by any means. Close to the village he met Antonina's sledge returning towards the house; she, too, apparently, had been at the *plebanija;* but it did not occur to him to wonder what she had been doing there at so early an hour. So closely was she wrapped in her furs that all he could see of her was the upper portion of her face, neither could he be sure whether she had noticed him.

It had been snowing since morning, and the outline of the familiar house was blurred with the flying flakes. The courtyard lay there silent as a cemetery, all its deficiencies temporarily whitewashed by an even coating of snow. An open barn-door, hanging precariously on one hinge, was half-snowed up, and a vagabond dog, in search of morsels, came slinking hungrily round the corner, pressing its lean sides against the walls.

As Radford got out of the sledge he was asking himself where he would be most likely to find Stepan, here, or at the schoolhouse? He was bent only on speaking to Stepan, without another hour's delay. At this time he would probably be at the schoolhouse, and while he was saying this to himself he perceived that some one was standing under the ash-trees at the far end of the courtyard, and

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even through the falling snow he immediately recognised his comrade. This was a better opportunity than he had hoped for. He crossed the courtyard, with his eyes upon the figure, as though he feared it might melt into the snowflakes and escape him, and so busy was he with this thought that he felt no surprise at finding Stepan here at this moment, not even when he drew near enough to perceive that the other was bare-headed. Nothing seemed to astonish him to-day. Stepan's back was towards him; he stood without moving under one of the trees, apparently doing nothing but watching the flakes.

In the new-fallen snow Radford's steps were unheard until he stood close beside Stepan.

"Stepan," he said, in a deeply moved voice, and he laid his hand upon his comrade's shoulder. "I have come to tell you everything. I want to put everything into your hands. You know all already. Have I a right to my happiness, or have I not? It is *you* who must pronounce my sentence."

And in hurried, badly connected words he told him of what had passed last night.

As Radford's hand touched him Stepan shuddered, but did not immediately turn his head.

"Do you hear me, Stepan?" asked Radford, with a new feeling of timidity, when, after a minute of silence, he had not yet seen the other's face.

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Then, quite suddenly, Stepan turned round, and, at sight of the look which met his own, Radford instinctively withdrew his hand and made a step backwards.

"Yes; I hear you," said Stepan, with undisguised fury in his black eyes, unrestrained passion in his halting voice, and in the sickly pallor which steeped him to the lips. "I hear you, and I have heard you and seen of you more than my strength is able to bear. Do you dare to come near me today, you who have been my misfortune from the first? Without you all would have been well. Why had you to come my way? Was not the world wide enough both for you and for me? Have you not everything you can want without robbing me? You have taken everything from me—everything; first you took my career and broke it in two as though it had been a toy,—my career and all my hopes and all my joy in life, and now you want to take from me also my love; the one thing that might have been mine. You have taken it already. If you had not come she might have loved me. She almost said so now. Why did you not leave us in peace? It is *you* who have spoilt everything. We cannot go on living near each other. Go quickly, and leave me alone."

He spoke almost without drawing breath, hoarsely and eagerly, and with his burning eyes

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fixed savagely upon the other's face. There was such a vehemence of hatred both in those eyes and in the nervous movements of the lips, so overpowering an evidence of the pent-up bitterness of two years past, that Radford's own gaze fell before that of his comrade. The complete surprise of this outburst would alone have been enough to keep him silent; but as he listened he understood also that there was nothing which he could say in reply. It was all true what Stepan was now saying—literally true. No one, surely, could be more convinced than he was of the utter injustice of the arrangement which had brought Stepan to this point. In spirit he found himself agreeing to every single sentence pronounced by his comrade. Yes, he had everything; health, prospects, money, and now love, while Stepan had nothing. Stepan was right; in every sense of the word he had been his misfortune. But was this really his own fault alone?

"Stepan," he attempted to say, "if I could only get you to understand——"

"Leave me alone!" said Stepan, with white lips. "I can bear nothing more. Go away quickly —go!"

He spoke as he had been used to speak when still in command of his troop, and with his left hand raised to point the way. And, without another word, Radford turned and with lowered head

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obeyed, merely because he felt as he had always felt—that that other will was stronger than his own.

On the doorstep Pater Floryan was awaiting him.

"Would you like to see her?" he asked, smiling at Radford through his tears. "We have made her as pretty as we could with paper roses, and Agniecka found five snowdrops in the garden. She went to sleep quite quietly, without pain. The *Pani* has probably told you already. She was here half an hour ago, and so kind, so sympathetic! She talked quite a long time with Stepan. You will come with me now, will you not?"

"Yes, I will come," said Radford, understanding at last that he was being invited to look at the laid-out body of Jusia, who had fulfilled the doctor's expectations by dying during the past night.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

Before the evening of that same day Radford had sent in a petition for leave of absence, and had begun to pack up his belongings. His way seemed to him quite simple now. He could do nothing but give up Antonina and disappear henceforward from out of her life. In one point Fate seemed inclined to make his task easy. For months past his father had been trying to persuade him to give up the army and undertake the management of the English estate recently inherited from a distant relative. He would only have to accede to the paternal wishes in order to break with the past. Perhaps when he was gone everything might be changed—everything, including Antonina's heart and Stepan's fate.

That same evening he completed his arrangements and looked up his train. The nearest railway-station was at several miles' distance from Lohatyn, and he would have to leave his lodging before daylight. By five o'clock next morning the hired sledge was standing at the door. With a

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candle on the table beside him, Radford was occupied in putting the last things into the portmanteau, which lay open before him on the floor, when a second sledge was heard to come down the street at a sharp pace. He was too busy to notice that it, too, stopped before the house. A minute later there was a sharp knock, and before he had replied, the door opened, and Stepan Milnovics entered.

Radford rose from his knees and stood looking at his comrade without speaking, but with an almost humble inquiry in his eyes. Just one minute before he had been telling himself that he should never again in this world see Stepan's features.

The other's face was like that of a man who has been ill to the point of death. About the eyes and at the corners of the mouth there were marks which had not been there yesterday. Yet, in spite of his pallor, it was evident that he was quiet now. Single flakes of snow hung upon his shabby overcoat, and the morning frost had stiffened his moustache and turned his black hair almost as white as the thin locks of his father.

Having closed the door behind him, he stood still and peered keenly round him at the dismantled room, at the disordered bed and open box, all uncertainly illuminated by the one candle.

"Yes," he said at last, "I thought it would be so. I am barely in time."

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Then only he turned towards Radford.

"I have come to ask you to forgive me for my words of yesterday," he said, without any visible effort.

"Stepan!" said Radford, and put out his hand. He could not say more, because already the tears had risen to his eyes.

"Wait a little!" replied Stepan, not immediately touching Radford's fingers. "We must have no emotions yet. I am not finished. What I have come to do is not easy. I have been looking for the right thing all night, and now I have found what I believe to be the only straight road, and I mean to tread it; but there must be no emotions yet. I must first explain my excitement of yesterday; it must have greatly astonished you. You will scarcely believe it—I can scarcely believe it myself—but it is the truth that in the ten minutes before you came I had been mad enough to speak to her of my love. Not that I hoped for anything, of course, and not that I had not sworn to myself a hundred times that no word of this sort should ever cross my lips, but only that I was taken unawares. It was when she came out of Jusia's room, with her eyes full of tears and her face full of beautiful sympathy, looking so gentle, so easily to be gained, holding out her hands to me so warmly. Then it was that, quite suddenly, I lost my hold

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upon myself. I suppose the strain of the last days had told upon my nerves; and there, at that moment, with my dead sister lying in the room beside us, I told her all that I had suffered for her sake, and asked her in desperate words whether it was indeed certain that she never, never could make up her mind to belong to me. I knew what she would say; but when I heard it said, it was a much greater pain than I had expected. I was still suffering the first smart of that pain when I felt your hand upon my shoulder. You will understand everything now. But all that is over. I have come to my senses again. Alfred, you must not go. I knew quite well that you would be on the point of starting, and I have come here to tell you that you have no right to go away, because you have no right to make her unhappy."

"She need not be unhappy for ever. When I am gone, why should she not learn to forget me?"

"And to love me?" said Stepan, with a faint smile. "It is that you meant to say, is it not? But you are wasting your pains; she will never love me now. I am the wrong man here, as I was the wrong man in our duel last year. It is the fate of some men never to be in the right place. Let us have no superfluous words, pray; do not force me to listen to your regrets. I have learnt long ago that he who has one good thing generally gets an-

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other, and he who has none will remain empty-handed until the end. That is only the order of the world. Happiness attracts happiness, just as one swallow builds where another has already made her nest. Under my roof they will not build. It was a lie when I said to you yesterday that you had robbed me of everything; you could not rob me, because I never possessed anything."

"You *might* have possessed it if I had not come," said Radford, in a broken voice. "You yourself said so yesterday."

Stepan shook his head. "That also was a lie; I was not in my senses yesterday. Such things are not for such men as me."

Until this moment they had both been standing opposite to each other in the middle of the room. Now Stepan sat down on the chair beside him and, leaning his left elbow on the table, shaded his eyes with his hand, perhaps in order to shield himself from the glare of the candle. His own shadow and that of Radford, grotesquely large, half covered the walls of the room and shifted at each movement of the flame.

"Listen, Alfred," he said after a minute; "you have been making mistakes all along. You have seen things only from one point of view, but there are others. During the night I have been looking at the past two years. I believe with you that there

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was a time—not when she loved me—but when she meant to marry me. But that is easily explained. A young girl, enthusiastic by nature to the point of fanaticism, constantly on the look-out for a mission to fulfil, meets a man pursued by Fate, and thinks she has found what she needs. To save me from misfortune struck her as a vocation worthy of herself, and with all the fearlessness of childhood she embraced the task. She did her best, poor child, but she failed. I cannot reproach her with anything. She has reproached herself already, but without ground. The instincts of pity and of rebelliousness are the two most strongly developed elements in her nature, and exactly these two elements combined to push her towards me—pity for my misfortune, and rebelliousness against the will of her aunt. Then, when she saw that she could not honestly love me, there came the recoil. I have watched all her childish struggles—my God! it was all so easy to follow!—the remorse at discovering how she had tortured me unawares, the abrupt drawing back, the dissatisfaction with herself,—and I have suffered with her and for her. At times I have been tempted to go up to her and to say, 'Do not reproach yourself because of me, for it is not true that I love you!' But the lie would not be spoken."

Radford still stood in the middle of the floor,

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listening intently to every word. What Stepan was saying seemed to him like the solution of many, many riddles. In the passage outside his soldier-servant could be heard disputing loudly with the Jewish driver, and in front of the house the sledge-bells of the waiting horses jingled monotonously whenever one of them moved its head.

"I shall never understand why she did not love you," said Radford slowly.

"Shall you not? Surely that is simple enough. There are all sorts of reasons why you should be preferred to me. You are rich and I am poor, you are prosperous and I——"

"Stepan!" interrupted Radford, colouring with indignation. "As if she ever took *that* into account!"

Stepan put up his hand. "Wait a minute! You do not quite understand me. Of course she did not take that into account; but is it her fault if she should be susceptible to an atmosphere, if, like others, she should be attracted by what is bright, rather than by what is dark? No, certainly, —just as little as it is wrong in a woman to love a strong man rather than a feeble one; one who can manage a horse or lift a weight, rather than one who cannot. These things lie deep in the law of human nature—of the animal side, if you will—but of all the more immovable a law, for we become

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flesh before we become spirit. And this, too, she has done. She loves you for your noble qualities, for your real goodness; but she loves you also for your golden curls and your blue eyes and for your iron muscles. Yes; you can glare at me as you like, but it is so. You did not know what a stride you had made in your own cause at the moment when you lifted that wheel out of the ice last year, but I knew it. Do you think I could not see quite plainly how I sank in her estimation beside you because I could not do it, had no right arm to do it with, while you, the same man who had disabled my arm, rose by another step? Even at the moment I found this quite natural. It is illogical, if you will, but it is unavoidable. Your physical strength alone would not have made her love you; but the proof of it gave the last touch that was still needed to inflame her imagination. Does it astonish you that I should be able to play the analyst at this moment? Probably it does, and yet it is very simple. Men on their death-bed often see much more clearly than they have ever seen before, and I am on my death-bed to-day,—the death-bed of my former life and of all its wishes. Believe me, my analysis is correct."

"I don't believe it. There are other things, surely, besides physical strength. There are your intellectual qualities,—and, Stepan, I have never

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lost an opportunity of bringing these under her notice. You must believe me in this; I have never spoken otherwise than in praise of you."

Stepan looked at him and nearly laughed. "And you never saw that exactly by upholding me and reviling yourself, as of course you found it your duty to do, you were unavoidably rising in her eyes? You forget that the underlying motive was clear to her; to every woman with a head and a heart, no, only with a heart, she does not need a head—it could not help being clear. Knowing, as she did, of your dream of atonement, the more earnestly you worked for me the more certainly must she become convinced of your unselfishness and generosity. No, Alfred, I tell you again; there is no other alternative. We are both pursued; you can as little escape from your good-fortune as I from my ill-luck. It is time for us both to surrender. Possibly it may be cruel, but neither of us can change the order of the world. As I said to you at first, you have no right to sacrifice her happiness. I cannot say to you, 'Take her!' because never even with one thought has she belonged to me; but if you believe that I love her, you will also believe that I cannot want her to be wretched."

There was another long pause. Stepan had again shaded his eyes with his hand. "Whether you fly or not everything will happen exactly as

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it is ordained." Once more Madame Serpow's words came back to Radford's memory. Was not that almost the same thing that he was hearing now?

"And you, Stepan?" he said at last, with a sort of diffidence.

"I?" Stepan laughed again, a little wearily. "You want to know what I will do? Why, go on teaching, of course, and very likely take a wife some day soon."

"Take a wife?" repeated Radford incredulously.

"Yes. I am told that either of the two teachers in the school—either the big mistress or the little mistress—would be ready to have me, and they are both respectable girls. I would rather stay single; but a schoolmaster needs a wife, and my father wants grandchildren, and since my sisters have given him none I shall have to do what is expected of me. I have disappointed him in my career; I do not want to disappoint him in this matter as well."

"Tell me, Stepan," asked Radford, coming a step nearer, "are you certain that you do not hate me?"

The other lowered his hand and looked at him musingly for a few moments.

"Yes; I think I am certain of that. I have

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tried to hate you, and—it is almost absurd to say so—I have failed. It was after I had reached the first stage of resignation and had been roused from out of it, that I came nearest to that danger. I had tried my strength against that of the giant, and had satisfied myself that it was not to be overcome. I might have found it possible to sit still now, if it had not been for *her* and for *you*. Visions of another sort of happiness began to tantalise me; I was wide awake again. When I began to understand that I was not loved I began also to hate you and everything besides, even my very life,—so I believed then; but I have seen since that even that was a mistake. Alfred, do you remember the day when you declared to my face that you knew you would conquer, that you would certainly gain my friendship? I thought of it as folly then, but it has nevertheless happened. You *have* conquered, you *have* gained me, in spite of everything I could do. My nature is hard and unforgiving, I know well that it is so, and yet you have forced me to do much more than forgive you. Probably this is the last time that we shall ever speak together, and it is better that you should know all. I owe to you more than to any one else in the world. I will not say that I am yet entirely resigned; but if ever I find that 'perfect peace,' which to my father supplies the place of happiness, it will only be because

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I have known you—yes, *you*, the same man who, humanly speaking, has been my misfortune. There must be a God, and He must be good if He makes such men as you. You have thrown me down, but you have also lifted me up again higher than before, for you have saved my faith for me. I do not know whether my words sound bitter, but I do not feel them so. Since I have quite understood you, the bitterness has gone out of me. I am suffering still, of course; but I know that the crisis of the struggle is over, and I can even conceive it possible that I may one day be contented."

While still speaking Stepan had risen and approached the door.

"Good-bye," he said, in a voice that had suddenly grown unsteady. Then, turning once more with his fingers on the handle, he appeared to be hesitating.

"Only one more word. I have never asked you for any favour, but I should like to ask for one now. I have heard that your father wishes you to return to England; if you could find it possible to do as he desires, you would make many things simpler for me. She will be happy wherever you take her, and when we are all a little older the meeting will be easier."

He spoke without looking at Radford, and went out before the other had replied.

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When his steps were no longer heard, Radford sat down and covered his face with his two hands. A mixture of the most opposite emotions overpowered him. Just at first it was a sense of pity which had the upper hand—an aching pity that was almost like a physical pain. But other sensations were awaiting their turn.

When he had sat for several minutes quite still, he looked up quickly, like a man who has remembered something. There were tears on his cheeks; but with a rapid gesture he brushed them away, and already an irrepressible smile was beginning to move his half-unwilling lips.

"You had no right to make her unhappy," Stepan had said. From all the words that had been spoken within the last half-hour these stood out with a distinctness of their own. In the tumult of feelings in which he had been living lately he had overlooked this one vital point. He might sacrifice himself, but what could justify him in sacrificing her?

"No; I have no right to make her unhappy!" he said, aloud and joyously; and rising quickly from his chair, he blew out the candle beside him and pulled up the blind of the window. In the east, over the house-tops, the sun was just becoming visible. The shadows in the street were gone; night was over, and day about to begin.

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At that moment Radford's servant put his head in by the door.

"If you please, *Herr Lieutenant*," he breathlessly announced, "the Jew says that we shall certainly miss the train if we do not start immediately."

Radford stared at him for a moment, uncomprehending.

"Tell the Jew to go home again to his garlic-soup," he said at last, almost laughing into the man's astonished face. "I am not going to start on my travels to-day."

Then, making a long stride forward, he knelt down once more before his open portmanteau, and began tumultuously pulling out the things which half an hour ago he had packed so carefully and so soberly.

THE END.

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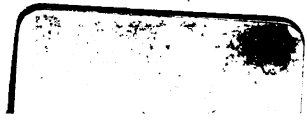

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